PEGGY of OLD ANNAPOLIS

By HAWTHORNE DANIEL

Peggy of Old Annapolis

"Oh, look, Mammy Lou," cried Peggy, drawing forth a tightly rolled slip of thin paper from the tube on the pigeon's leg, "there *is* a message in it."

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by

HAWTHORNE DANIEL

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To

My Sister Ethel

A Modern Daughter of the Old South

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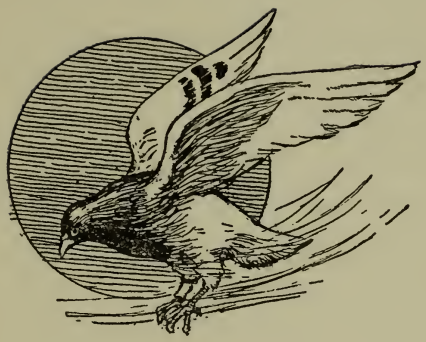
MESSAGES



CHAPTER I

MESSAGES

PEGGY PENDLETON sat unhappily in the summer-house on the shaded lawn, and gazed through the trees at the broad and sunlit smoothness of Spa Creek. From where she sat, beside the broad estuary that led to the near-by harbor, to where the broader Severn River undulated gently on the other side of the little city, all of Annapolis seemed to be asleep. The leaves on the trees hung motionless in the hot sunlight. Scattered and dignified mansions stood without a sign of life as the heat waves quivered above their broad, steep roofs. The dusty, unpaved streets were empty, and even the shops, with shades drawn against the searching sun, gave no sign of the life that made the little city the outstanding center of culture and fashion in all the thirteen colonies.

But silent though the city was, save for the insistent rasp of the locusts among the leaves and the occasional cry of a sea gull as it floated over the harbor, there was not a citizen of Annapolis—not a citizen of all Maryland—who did not know that for all the silence of that hot June day, powerful forces

were at work to turn the peace of the colonies into a seething struggle to uphold the rights of men. Already, over a year before, the Minute Men of Massachusetts had fought the first battles of what was to be a fierce and long-drawn war. Before that, in Annapolis itself, the brig *Peggy Stewart* had been burned with its hated cargo of tea within sight of the people of the town. Already a mob had burned Zachariah Hood in effigy when he had returned to Maryland from England to act as the representative of George III under the abominated regulations of the Stamp Act.

Nor were these the only signs of resentment among the people of the thirteen colonies. The city of Norfolk, in Virginia, had been bombarded months before by the British, and even on that hot June day in 1776, the soldiers from across the Atlantic were soundly defeated by the patriot troops of South Carolina, while in Philadelphia the Continental Congress, made up of representatives of all the thirteen colonies, was busily debating and drawing up the document that was to become, in less than a month, the Declaration of Independence.

Thus it was that Annapolis only *seemed* to be asleep, for actually, almost every person who dwelt within the little city's narrow limits was already a partisan in the struggle that had begun. Yet, divided

though the fashionable world of this "Paris of America" was between those who still held to their allegiance to the king, and those who were ready to fight for liberty, there were some who fearfully tried to walk a middle path, lest they should suffer the loss of their goods by mistakenly joining either side. And others still there were who, in order to protect their belongings and their wealth, tried—as if they really thought that such a thing were possible—to please both sides—tried to shout with the patriots as well as with the upholders of the king—tried to pretend that their sympathies lay with whichever side was uppermost at the moment—did their utmost to run with the hare and to hunt with the hounds. Honest people there were, of course, who stood faithful in their support of King George, just as there were honest people who stood ready to rebel against him. But there were those who fell into neither of these two classes—selfish, self-centered men, willing to play any dishonest part rather than risk their acres and their fortunes.

These were the divisions into which practically all the citizens of the colonies divided themselves, but in Peggy Pendleton there was one person, at least, who viewed all this excitement with nothing more than a shrug of her smooth shoulders and a toss of her pretty head. It is true that the experience of her fifteen

years was hardly sufficient to justify her in forming an opinion so decidedly her own, yet she formed it, for all that, and expressed it, too.

"*Both* sides are wrong," she had declared only the evening before, in the library of the big house where Governor Eden was discussing with her father the seriousness of the situation. "King George should not send his Hessian soldiers to kill our people, and our people should not be so ready to fight over a silly little tax. Why can't both sides be reasonable?"

Governor Eden had smiled half-heartedly.

"Each side asks the other to be reasonable, Mistress Peggy," he had replied. "But I, for one, who am loyal to His Majesty, can see no such simple solution to the problem. Nor, I'll warrant, can your father. Can you, Mr. Pendleton?"

"The stand these would-be rebels take is highly impractical," replied Mr. Pendleton. "But they won't go through with it. Mark my word."

"I can't agree with you there," replied the Governor. "I'm afraid that armed rebellion is upon us now, though what is to be the outcome is beyond me."

Then the conversation had gone off into abstractions that meant nothing to Peggy, who, for once, went mildly off to bed when she saw her mother raise her gentle eyes from her embroidery, and motion

faintly with her head toward the hall and the massive stairs.

And now, with Annapolis seemingly asleep in the heat of that June day, Peggy Pendleton was sitting in the summerhouse on the lawn overlooking the smooth and wide-spreading beauty of Spa Creek, rebellious and prettily angry that all this unnecessary trouble between the colonies and King George should prevent her from having the birthday party to which she had been looking forward for weeks and weeks and weeks.

It was the strained political situation that had kept Mr. Pendleton and his family at their Annapolis home so late in the season. Always before, Peggy, with her mother and father, had set out in May, with their handsome coach and four, their coachman, their footman, and their outriders, to journey over twelve miles of abominable roads to Mr. Pendleton's huge plantation near the Patuxent River. And it was there that Peggy had always theretofore been given her birthday parties—parties to which the ladies and gentlemen, the boys and girls from every plantation for miles around had been invited.

Her cousin, Will Taylor, who was one year older than herself, had always been the life of the parties, and he, with his parents, had already gone to their plantation which adjoined that of the Pendletons.

So, unless Mr. Pendleton decided to go to the country before very long, it would be impossible to have any party at all, for every one worth while (as Peggy felt at the moment) save only her own family and one or two others, was already gone from Annapolis, and only in the country, at that time of year, were there the people she cared to invite to make up a party worth the having.

So Peggy's disposition, which was changeable at best, was not at the moment so bright as it might have been. She had ordered patient Mammy Lou away, and the rotund colored woman, who had nursed her as a baby and had watched over her during almost every waking moment since, had shaken her head in defeat as she had waddled away along the garden path.

" 'Clar t' goodness," she had mumbled. "Miss Peggy done got powerful het up 'bout sumpin. 'Tain't no place fo' Mammy Lou when Miss Peggy fly off de handle like dat."

And now Peggy sat pouting in the summerhouse, dissatisfied with the world and with almost everything in it—unhappy and of the opinion that she was the most unfortunate girl in all of Maryland. All about her lay the beauty of Maryland in early summer, but she saw nothing of it. She did not see the sunlight glinting through the leaves. She did not

smell the sweet, heavy odor of the wild honeysuckle. She did not hear the sounds of the locusts in the trees about her, nor did she see the wavering reflections in the sunlit smoothness of Spa Creek. The world, it seemed to Peggy, was out of joint, and all because she could not have her birthday party.

For the better part of an hour she sat there, and without realizing it she was slowly recovering from her depression and her feeling that an injustice had been done her. Changeable as were her moods, she was much more often happy and carefree than depressed, just as she was much more often active and full of life than passive and silent. And now, after brooding for an hour over her trials and tribulations, she was, without quite realizing it herself, very nearly ready once again for action and laughter and fun.

Still, however, she had made no move, when she saw a bird flutter down through an opening in the trees and alight heavily upon the grass within a dozen feet of the summerhouse steps. It was the strange lack of birdlike lightness in the newcomer that caught Peggy's attention, and instantly she sat up in order the better to see what kind of bird it was.

There the little creature sat—one wing half unfolded and resting awkwardly on the grass—its feathers disheveled—its legs gathered weakly up beneath it—its breast fluttering and its eyes dull. That

it was either injured or worn was obvious to even the most casual glance, and Peggy, her own troubles instantly forgotten, rose to her feet and carefully made her way toward the spent bird, more than willing to lend a helping hand.

The little creature made not the slightest move to escape as Peggy approached, and showed no fear when the girl's two hands encircled it and lifted it from the grass.

"Why," cried Peggy. "It's a carrier pigeon. Mammy Lou!"

There was no reply, for Mammy Lou had taken her dismissal seriously.

"Mammy Lou!" the girl cried again. "Mammy Lou!"

"Yes, chile," came Mammy Lou's voice from the vicinity of the kitchen. "I'se comin'."

"You're *never* around when I want you," cried Peggy as the colored woman came waddling hurriedly along the path. "Bring me some water and some food at once. I've found a worn-out carrier pigeon. Hurry."

Mammy Lou turned obediently about, but she grumbled as she did so.

"Nevah 'roun' when she want me," she said aloud to herself. "Fust she tell me t' git away, 'cause she don't want me 'roun'. An' then she holler fo' me an'

say I ain't nevah 'roun' when she want me. 'Clar t' goodness, dey ain't no way fo' t' tell what Miss Peggy *do* want."

She waddled on a little way and broke forth into a chuckle.

" 'Clar t' goodness," she mumbled, "if she ain't de sweetest little lady in Maryland."

The food and water were shortly forthcoming, and from the depths of Peggy's lap the tired bird ate and drank.

"Where'd he come from?" asked Mammy Lou presently.

"I don't know," admitted Peggy. "But he must have come a long way, for he's all worn out."

"What's dat thing on his laig?"

"That's the tube they put the messages in," explained Peggy.

"Pigeons put messages in dere an' carry 'em 'roun'?" demanded the colored woman. "Go 'way, chile. I knows better'n dat. Pigeons caint write no more'n I kin."

"Not the pigeons, Mammy Lou," explained Peggy. "The men who own the pigeons. They put the message in there and the pigeons carry them."

"Whar dey carry 'em?"

"Well, I don't know much about it," admitted Peggy. "But I think the men take the pigeons away

from where they live and release them, and then they carry the messages home."

"Sounds kinda crazy t' me. Is dey one in dere now?"

"Why, perhaps there is," replied Peggy, looking more closely at the tube. "Oh, look, Mammy Lou. There *is* one."

She drew forth a tightly rolled slip of thin paper, and unrolled it. On one side there was nothing intelligible—just four vertical rows of letters with eight letters in each row. Peggy glanced at them but gave them little thought, for when she turned the tiny sheet of paper over it was to discover ten readily understandable hand lettered words. She almost cried aloud with pleasure as she read them, and Mammy Lou raised her eyebrows and studied her young mistress's face.

"What do it say, Miss Peggy?" she asked. "An' who done sent it?"

"Why, I might have known," cried Peggy. "It's from Cousin Will, of course. He told me he had built a pigeon loft at Hallwood and had bought some carrier pigeons. And what he says is a secret."

"What do it say?" asked Mammy Lou again.

"He says it's a secret," replied Peggy, reading the note again, but Mammy Lou was impressed less than not at all.

"Yes, chile," she replied. "I knows dat, but what *am* de secret?"

"If I read it to you will you promise not to say a word about it to any one?"

" 'Course I promise," nodded Mammy Lou. "Ain't I always kept secrets wif you?"

"But you forget sometimes."

"I won't forget this'n, Miss Peggy."

"Well then, listen. Here's what it says: 'Have completed plans for party. Certain of success. Secret. Will' "

"What party you reckon he mean?"

"Why, my birthday party, Mammy Lou."

"Mph! How you reckon he so sure he goin' t' do like he say?"

Peggy looked puzzled. She knew well enough that Will Taylor was likely to succeed at whatever he set out to do, but how he could accomplish this feat was beyond her.

"Well," she admitted, "I don't know."

"Mph," grunted Mammy Lou. "Why you don't write him and tell de bird to take it to him? Then you kin ask him what fer plan he got."

"But the bird won't take it back, will he?"

"He done brought one, didn't he?" asked Mammy Lou indignantly. "How come he won't take one back?"

Peggy's eyes brightened.

"I'll do it," she cried. "Quick, Mammy Lou. Bring me a piece of paper and a quill and ink."

The colored woman waddled obediently to the house and brought back the writing implements, and Peggy, giving Mammy Lou the bird to hold, laboriously began to write a note sufficiently small to be inserted in the tube. For fifteen minutes she struggled over it, carefully printing the letters as they were printed in the message she had received, so that they might be clear and legible.

"There," she cried at last, "how's that, Mammy Lou?"

Mammy Lou looked solemnly at the note for a moment. "Mm-mph," she grunted. "Dat look fine, Miss Peggy. What do it say?"

"It says 'Do not see how party can succeed. Can't you let me have more details?' "

"Ain't you gwine to write your name?"

"No, Mammy Lou. Will says it's a secret. He'll know whom it's from."

"Den you gwine tell de bird to carry it?"

Peggy rolled the note up tightly, inserted it in the tube, and took the bird. She stroked its feathers and then raised the little creature above her head. For a moment the pigeon sat motionless on her open hands, and then, somewhat rested now, spread its

wings, ascended in ever widening spirals, and disappeared over the tree tops.

Peggy watched the pigeon until it was out of sight, and then, with a smile on her lips and laughter in her heart, she folded up the tiny note the bird had brought and deposited it carefully in the elaborately embroidered "pocket" that hung from her waist.

The hot afternoon sun sank slowly toward the west. The garden lost some of the heat of midday, and Peggy, happy now with thoughts of her secret and plans for the party that somehow—though she knew not how—was to be given, sat contented and busy with her embroidery on the portico of the big house. From the servants' quarters came the music of a Negro song, and from out upon Spa Creek came the clank of oars as a fisherman made his way home over the smooth water. Still Annapolis was silent—still the summer day was unbroken by any but the gentlest of sounds.

But as Peggy embroidered and hummed happily to herself, she heard the distant sound of galloping hoofs. At first she paid no attention to the sound, but suddenly it grew louder and came more clearly to her ears, as if the horse had turned into the street beyond the garden. For another minute the hoofs pounded loudly, and then, from just beyond the hedge beside the gate, she heard the animal as it was pulled

up suddenly—heard the creak of saddle leather as the horseman dismounted.

Peggy wondered why any one should be in such a hurry when the heat hung so oppressively all about, but gave no further thought to the matter until she heard the gate as it swung open, and saw a man as he hurried through and strode rapidly toward the steps leading up to where she sat. From his attitude the newcomer seemed to be on an errand of importance.

Peggy stopped her sewing as the man ran rapidly up the flight of white steps, and recognized him as Robert Perrin, a planter who dwelt ten miles or so from town. She had never met him, it is true, and knew little enough about him. Still, even from his costume she would have known him as a gentleman of position. His wig was of the very latest style, curled and powdered perfectly, though it was a little awry from his hurried ride. His coat and his breeches were of dark green silk, while his vest was handsomely brocaded. A small sword hung at his side, and his buckled shoes were fitted with red heels in the latest fashion from London.

He was dusty from his ride, and overheated, for beads of perspiration stood out upon his forehead; but as soon as he saw Peggy, he swept off his hat with a graceful flourish and bowed.

"Your pardon," he began. "May I see Mr. Pendleton?"

Peggy rose and curtsied.

"If you will follow me, sir," she replied, "I shall lead you to him."

Without another word she made her way through the massive doorway, and led the newcomer through the dark, cool hall toward her father's study, where Mr. Pendleton sat at his ease, with a book in his hand, and a glass of wine at his elbow.

"You have a visitor, Father," said Peggy as she motioned the newcomer in, and without waiting for any reply, she turned and made her way back to her chair on the portico.

"Well, Perrin," she vaguely heard her father say as she passed through the door. "What brings you abroad on such a day as this?"

She did not hear Perrin reply, and thought nothing more of the matter, merely returning to the portico to resume her embroidery and her thoughts of the party Will was planning.

For half an hour Peggy hummed to herself and embroidered, while she wondered what plans Will could possibly be making, and hardly looked up when Mr. Pendleton and Mr. Perrin finally came from the house together, making their way solemnly down the steps and along the garden path to the gate. It was

only at supper that evening that she learned the reason for Mr. Perrin's visit and for her father's serious manner.

"I'm sorry, Emily," he said to his wife while the meal was being served, "but I must leave early in the morning for Philadelphia. Mr. Perrin brought me a strange message from Mr. Morton this afternoon. I don't understand it, exactly, but apparently he feels that it is important that I join him in Philadelphia."

Peggy said nothing, but she wondered whether or not this new development would prevent Will from carrying out his plan. It *did* seem as if everything was against her—as if Fate itself had stepped in to prevent her having the party upon which she had set her heart, and though her mother and father talked all through the meal of Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin and the trip to Philadelphia, Peggy hardly heard a word of it, for she was wondering when Will would answer the note that she had entrusted to the pigeon.

MYSTERIES

CHAPTER II

MYSTERIES

To travel from Annapolis to Philadelphia is, to-day, a matter of a little over three hours, but to Peggy's father, as he set off before the sun rose on that calm June morning of 1776, it was a hard journey that would consume three days. Three days on horseback, then, with a Negro servant on horseback following along, with saddlebags loaded to the bursting point, and with the most miserable of roads to be traversed, was what Mr. Pendleton had to look forward to as he kissed his wife and daughter a sorrowful farewell, and set off.

The strange wording of the message Perrin had brought still puzzled him, and yet, what else could he do? It almost seemed as if Morton had lost his head, for always before his messages had been clear and pointed enough. Furthermore, until the arrival of this message, all the reports had been as favorable as could be. The purpose of the Congress being held in Philadelphia was to draw up for the thirteen colonies some document declaring them free and independent of England. The purpose Mr. Pendleton

had in mind was to oppose the adoption of such a document. Furthermore, both Morton who had arrived from England only two months before, and Perrin whom he had chosen to assist him, were representatives of the crown, and as such were laboring to attain the same ends as Mr. Pendleton himself desired—that is, to oppose those who, in opposing the laws passed in England for the control of the colonies, advocated rebellion and independence.

It seemed impossible, of course, that certain of the colonies could be influenced in favor of moderation. Massachusetts was a veritable hotbed of disloyalty, and it would be time wasted to attempt to keep that fiery colony from rebellion against the king. Rebellion had long since started there. Battles had been fought. Patriots had been killed. Thus, in so far as Massachusetts was concerned, Mr. Pendleton shrugged his shoulders as he rode along, certain that he could do nothing for his king there.

Nor was it likely that he could do much elsewhere in New England, for the other colonies there were of much the same breed as Massachusetts. But not for nothing had Mr. Pendleton given this great matter so much thought. He had a plan that, while it would not prevent rebellion, would make it possible to put the rebellion down quickly and finally.

Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, Virginia and the

Carolinas—those, Mr. Pendleton admitted, were hopeless cases of rebellion. There was no possible way to keep them from the path they were already following—the path that pointed toward their desire for independence. But it seemed likely to Mr. Pendleton that, with care and hard work, New York and Maryland might be convinced of the desirability of supporting the king. Delaware, too, might be held in the king's ranks, but New York and Maryland were most important, for with these two powerful colonies aligned against the rebellious others, the rebellion would automatically be divided into three disconnected parts, with New England cut off from Pennsylvania and New Jersey by a loyal New York, and with the fire eaters and rebels of the southern colonies disconnected from the others by a loyal Maryland. Thus, with the rebellion split into three parts, the English armies could readily and certainly put down the rebels in each of these separate sections—could regain their control of New England, could next put down the rebellion in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, and finally could turn their attention to the powerful group of rebels in Virginia, the Carolinas and Georgia.

Furthermore, this plan seemed to be working out perfectly until the arrival of Morton's latest note. The representatives of New York seemed unwilling

to take the responsibility of signing any document declaring for independence without taking it back to New York with them for further instructions. Delaware was most certainly divided on the question, and a little more work might readily win them over to the king's side. Maryland, on the other hand, was difficult, yet Mr. Pendleton knew intimately the representatives of his colony at Philadelphia—knew them to be clear-minded, honest gentlemen, and knew that they would always listen to any reasonable presentation of the case.

It was to them that he had sent Morton, thus opening the way for that representative of the crown to influence the men who, in turn, could, he knew, influence Maryland. And now after a dozen favorable messages had arrived, Morton suddenly seemed to have run into difficulties, and so had written for aid. That, of course, was understandable enough, but why he should have written so strangely worded a note was more than Mr. Pendleton could see.

While Mr. Pendleton was making his way laboriously over the abominable roads toward Baltimore and Havre de Grace and Philadelphia, Peggy was contentedly wondering just what plans Cousin Will might have developed. She even decided to write Will a letter, in which, at greater length than in the note the pigeon had taken, she could question him

concerning that all important party. But not wishing her mother or Mammy Lou to know what she was doing, she went to her room, closed the door, and sat down at her desk.

For five minutes, perhaps, she had sat there, without having written a word, when suddenly she felt her kitten as he arched his back and rubbed himself against her. She looked down in surprise. She had left him on the porch when, ten minutes before, she had come upstairs. Furthermore, she had shut her door, and though the windows were open, it seemed unlikely that he could have come in by either of them.

She picked him up and looked at him questioningly.

"Why, Peter," she demanded. "How did you get in here?"

"Meow," replied Peter.

"Are you telling me the truth?" insisted Peggy.

"Meow," repeated Peter.

"Do you really mean you came through the window?" asked Peggy.

This time Peter did not reply.

"Well, anyway," continued Peggy, "I'm going to see how you could have done it."

But search as she would, she could not see how the kitten could have come through the window. The porch roof was twenty feet away. The trees were

even farther, and unless Peter had learned how to climb a bare brick wall, such a route was impossible.

"I don't see how you did it, Peter," she commented at last. "You must be a highly unusual cat. Oh, Peter, you bad kitten. Look at the marks you've made on my dress."

She put him on the floor once more and returned to her desk, but her desire to write seemed to have left her. She toyed with the quill pen for a time, and finally threw it down, in disgust.

"Oh, I don't want to write a letter," she cried aloud. "Come here, Peter."

She turned about expecting to find her kitten stretched upon the floor, but no kitten was to be seen. She called to him and he did not answer. She looked under the bed, behind the chest of drawers, on top of the canopy of her four-poster, but he was not to be found. She even looked in the empty fireplace, but no sign of Peter could she find, and when five minutes later, having gone downstairs, she found him comfortably asleep upon a chair on the porch, she was more mystified than ever.

"Why, Peter Pendleton," she scolded. "I think it's outrageous the way you appear and disappear. How do you do it?"

But Peter did not reply. He merely stretched himself and yawned as if strange appearances and dis-

appearances were thoroughly commonplace after all. Nor was she any the less mystified when she told Mammy Lou about it, for the old colored woman rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Spirits," whispered Mammy Lou, mysteriously. "Spirits. Cats and witches. Cats and witches. Better git yourself a rabbit's foot, Miss Peggy. De left hind foot of a rabbit what's been killed in de dark of de moon. That'll keep the witches away. That Peter cat of yourn, what looks so soft. He ain't, Miss Peggy. Don't you never let him in your room when you're asleep, or he'll rob you of your breath. And if Joseph ever find him 'round de barn he's liable t' kill him."

"Kill him?" cried Peggy. "Why should he kill him?"

"To keep him from ridin' de horses at night."

"What do you mean?"

Mammy Lou rolled her eyes again.

"Don't you know how cats ride horses?"

"What nonsense," cried Peggy.

" 'Tain't no nonsense," replied Mammy Lou. "Honest. They climb up in de horse's mane and dey makes stirrups out of de hair, and den dey rides de horses all night, till dey's all wore out. Dat's de reason why cats sleep so much in de daytime. 'Cause dey's up to so much debilment at night."

"Oh, that's all foolishness, Mammy Lou," objected Peggy. "Cats can't do such things."

"Mebbe so," nodded Mammy Lou. "Mebbe so. But how come dat Peter cat git in your room wif de door closed lessen he fly in like de witches do, on a broomstick?"

Peggy laughed at the idea of Peter flying into her room on a broomstick, but though she did not accept that explanation for his appearance there, she could give no other.

For five days Peggy looked eagerly for a reply from Will about her party, and with Mammy Lou kept a keen lookout for the arrival of another carrier pigeon in the garden. But watch though they did, no bird came. It never occurred to either Peggy or Mammy Lou that their message could have fallen into other hands than those for whom it was intended. Nor did they question the theory that they had formed. Still, it seemed strange that no further word had come, for should a birthday party materialize, it was time that something definite be done about it, unless, of course, it was to be a surprise party. That possibility, when it popped into Peggy's mind, seemed to open up all sorts of pleasant prospects. Perhaps Will was arranging for a party to be given in Annapolis. Perhaps, at the very last minute, he would come for her and take her to Hallwood just in time to be greeted

by the assembled guests. Perhaps—but there were many possibilities, though she *did* wish that she knew something definite.

It was a great temptation to ask her mother about the whole affair, but her innate loyalty prevented that. The note she had received had, as she had interpreted it, said that the arrangements for the party were secret. She had told Mammy Lou, of course, but Mammy Lou had been at least partly responsible for her finding the note. The colored woman, consequently, seemed to Peggy to have a right to the secret. But to take the secret to her mother seemed very different, for that would be giving the affair away, and under those circumstances it could certainly no longer be considered a secret at all. Consequently she carefully avoided any mention of the matter.

Mrs. Pendleton, on her part, had other things on her mind. Her husband's sudden departure for Philadelphia had been surprising. More than that, she knew that throughout the colonies the supporters of the king were daily growing more and more unpopular. Some had been forced to flee to England. Here and there one was tarred and feathered. Not more than a month before, the country home of a particularly unpopular one had been burned to the ground. Some of this unpopularity Mrs. Pendleton

felt was justifiable enough, for some of the opponents of the patriots were extreme in their loyalty to King George and unwise in their expression of it. But well she knew that extreme difficulties might result in case the patriot leaders ever relaxed in their control of the populace. Should a patriot mob ever break loose, any terrible thing was possible. Thus she was especially worried in the absence of Mr. Pendleton, and thus, too, she was especially watchful of Peggy. Rare indeed were the occasions when Peggy was permitted to leave the broad lawn and garden of Pendleton Hall, though, like the wise woman she was, Mrs. Pendleton never breathed a word of her worries to her daughter, and Peggy did not even realize that she was being kept at home more closely than was customary.

On the evening of the fifth day after Mr. Pendleton's departure, Peggy and her mother had supper together in the huge, high-ceiled dining room of Pendleton Hall. The great mahogany table was lighted by a dozen candles in polished silver candlesticks. The heavy polished plate on the dully shining sideboard glinted with the reflections of still other candles. The table, far too large for two, seemed like an island of light in the dignified gloom of the huge room, while the fireplace yawned, black and empty beneath the graceful lines of the simple mantel.

Neither Peggy nor her mother had had much to say during the meal and the movements of Cornelius, as he served them, had been restrained in consequence.

Supper was nearly over, and the faint light from the western sky had completely faded from the small-paned windows when the silent dining room reëchoed to a loud, brazen series of sounds that came from the brass knocker of the front door. Instantly Cornelius departed to answer the call, and after a short absence, returned.

"Hit's Marse Morton, Miss Em'ly," he announced to Mrs. Pendleton.

"Mr. Morton?" echoed Mrs. Pendleton in surprise.

"Yas'm."

"But he's in Philadelphia," objected Mrs. Pendleton.

"Mebbe so," nodded Cornelius. "Mebbe so. But he's in de liberry now, Miss Em'ly."

"Bring him in here, Cornelius," ordered Mrs. Pendleton, "and set another place. He must be tired."

Cornelius nodded.

"Yas'm. Yas'm. He tired all right. He tired."

And off went the faithful Negro, while Mrs. Pendleton looked in surprise at Peggy.

"What's the matter, Mother?"

"I don't know, dear. Nothing, perhaps. But your father went to Philadelphia— Sh— Here he comes."

Cornelius bowed Mr. Morton into the room, and as he entered, he paused on the threshold for a moment. He was a tall man, thin and dark eyed. His clothes bore the marks of a long ride, and the lines of his face showed that he was tired. His wig, however, covered his hair and made him appear younger than he was, and his well-cut clothes, dusty and wrinkled though they were, became him well. His brows were heavy, his eyes deep set. His nose was prominent and sharply hooked, while his jaw was firm and his lips were thin.

"Welcome, Mr. Morton," greeted Mrs. Pendleton. "Will you sup with us?"

"With pleasure, Mistress Pendleton," he replied, "if you will forgive the stains of travel."

Cornelius brought a chair to the table and Morton sat down.

"What word do you bring of my husband, Mr. Morton?" asked Mrs. Pendleton.

The newcomer looked at her, surprised.

"Of your husband?" he echoed. "Word of your husband? I have but just come from Philadelphia to see him, madam."

It was Mrs. Pendleton's turn to be surprised.

"But you sent for him," she objected. "He left five days ago."

"I?" asked Morton. "I sent for him? I assure you, madam, that I did not."

"But I saw your note," protested Mrs. Pendleton.

Mr. Morton looked puzzled.

"Does Mr. Perrin know of this?" he asked.

"It was he who brought your message," replied Mrs. Pendleton.

"Is it possible to send for him?" asked Morton.

"This evening? He lives at some distance."

"I know, but it may be vitally important," explained Morton.

Mrs. Pendleton seemed to be perplexed. That something was amiss she was certain, and how serious it might be she did not know. But whatever it was, she had no desire to discuss the matter before Peggy. For a moment she did not know what to do, but suddenly she decided.

"Very well," she replied. "I can send Joseph. It is ten miles to Mr. Perrin's plantation, but Joseph knows the way, even in the dark. Peggy, dear, will you please find Joseph and tell him to saddle Ginger, and prepare himself for a ride to Mr. Perrin's. When he is ready have him come to me. Mr. Morton will write a note for him to take."

Peggy was disappointed. All this mystery was

very intriguing to her, and now she was being asked to go for Joseph just when the whole matter was becoming most interesting.

"Can't Cornelius—" she began, but her mother had no intention of permitting her to hear the rest of the conversation.

"Cornelius must serve Mr. Morton his supper," she replied. "Run along, dear. It is important."

And regretfully Peggy left the dining room, wondering what all the mystery could be—confident that, somehow, some one was interfering with messages sent to her father, and fiercely indignant that any one should dare.

VOICES

CHAPTER III

VOICES

THOUGH Peggy was gone from the dining room not more than ten minutes on her errand to Joseph, she returned to find the conversation between her mother and Mr. Morton revolving about the most casual subjects. She noticed that as she reëntered the room the two seemed to stop in the middle of some discussion or other, hesitating for a moment before they spoke of weather and roads and crops and political conditions. But Peggy, guileless herself, was unsuspicious of others, and though she had fully expected to hear from Mr. Morton some story of intrigue and excitement, she was not really surprised to find that neither her mother nor their visitor seemed perturbed or excited. She was a little disappointed, of course, but she said nothing, and sat silently until Mr. Morton had finished his meal.

The three went to the huge drawing room, where Joseph finally appeared, dressed for his ride. Nor was Peggy enlightened in the least about its purpose, for Mr. Morton, at Mrs. Pendleton's suggestion, went to Mr. Pendleton's study, and wrote a note to Mr.

Perrin, while Joseph sat waiting patiently in the hall.

"What's happened, Mother?" whispered Peggy when Mr. Morton had left the room.

Her mother smiled.

"Nothing, dear," she replied. "Mr. Morton has just arrived from Philadelphia and feels that it is important that he and Mr. Perrin attend to some business or other."

"But you said he sent for Father, and he said he didn't," insisted Peggy. "How could that be?"

"Just a misunderstanding, dear," patiently replied Mrs. Pendleton.

For five minutes or more the two sat silently in the semi-darkness of the huge, candle-lighted room. Mrs. Pendleton had tried her best to appear at ease and unworried, but there was a single little furrow between her eyes that told Peggy as clearly as words could have done that everything was not as it should be. It is true that the girl was unsuspicious by nature, and yet she knew, from long experience, that that little wrinkle between her mother's eyes was a sign of worry. It was always there, for instance, if any one was ill in the house. It had been there nearly two years before when the brig *Peggy Stewart* had arrived from London to be met by a mob that might have caused bloodshed had not the Committee of Correspondence prevailed upon the owner of the ves-

sel to set her afire and destroy her with her hated cargo of tea. Peggy remembered that well. The little city had been excited for days over the incident. Mobs marched shouting here and there. Threats and danger seemed constantly in the air, and all during that exciting time Mrs. Pendleton had worn that little wrinkle of worry on her brow, just as she wore it now.

Peggy heard Mr. Morton as he came from the study—heard him vaguely as he talked in an undertone to Joseph in the hall—heard Joseph go out and close the door. And though Mr. Morton reëntered the drawing room with an effort to appear carefree and happy, it was an effort that did not succeed. Nor had the atmosphere changed when, an hour later, Mrs. Pendleton raised her eyes to Peggy's and beckoned with her head that it was time to go to bed.

"Mr. Morton will have the room next to yours, dear," explained Mrs. Pendleton. "Tell Mammy Lou to make it ready for him."

And with that Peggy curtsied to Mr. Morton, kissed her mother, and made her slow way up the fine old staircase, wondering what it was that was so obviously worrying her mother—wondering how it could be that a message should come from Mr. Morton asking her father to go to Philadelphia when Mr. Morton said he never sent for him—that, in fact, he himself had journeyed from Philadelphia for no other pur-

pose than to see Mr. Pendleton here at Pendleton Hall.

She gave Mammy Lou her mother's orders about Mr. Morton's room, and went slowly on to her own, carrying her candle in her hand, and shielding it against the drafts of the huge hall as she walked.

More than a few strange things had happened lately. Will's carrier pigeon, for instance. Why hadn't Will sent a reply to her message? And her kitten. How had the little fellow managed to get into her room and out again when the door was closed and the windows were so inaccessible? And now this strange message from Mr. Morton that had called her father away to Philadelphia when Mr. Morton said that he had sent no such message.

Peggy shook her head and closed her door behind her. It was very strange. Never before in her life had she had anything mysterious befall her, and now everything was mysterious. Things that could not possibly have any connection with each other had suddenly begun to happen in a most unnatural sort of way.

She set her candle down on the mahogany lowboy and looked about her. Being a healthy, normal girl she had no particular fear of the witches and spirits and hobgoblins that Mammy Lou so obviously believed in, but as she looked out the open windows into

the blackness of the night—as she heard the wind rustle the leaves of the trees on the lawn—as she saw the flashing lights of hundreds of fireflies as they glowed momentarily and disappeared in the darkness, she could not resist the temptation to close the windows and the heavy wooden blinds as well.

The shrill, piping call of a treefrog in a neighboring tree caused little shivers to run up and down her spine. Even that familiar sound seemed suddenly mysterious to her when she had never before given it a moment's thought.

She heard Mammy Lou bustling about in the hall, and that, at least, gave her a sense of security and safety. Certainly no one could imagine that Mammy Lou had anything mysterious about her. Even her notions of witches and spirits were too naïve to be mysterious.

Peggy stood looking at her candle, watching the blaze as it flickered for no apparent reason and then resumed its steady, honest light. For several minutes she stood there, her eyes focused on nothing in particular, her mind strangely unclear, troubled with a dozen conflicting thoughts. She thought of Joseph making his way along the dark road, half way to Mr. Perrin's by now, perhaps. She wished that she had brought her kitten with her to her room. She wouldn't have felt quite so alone, if he had been there.

She wondered what her father was doing. She pretended to scold Will for not letting her know more about his plans for her party.

But suddenly she shook herself out of her abstractions, undressed hurriedly, and climbed the three steps up to her huge canopied four-poster, where Mammy Lou had turned back the lavender-scented sheets. She turned about and snuffed the candle, and then, as an afterthought in the velvet blackness of the room, stepped to the floor again and made her way to her window. She folded back the shutters, struggled with the window, raised it and thrust the window stick under it. And now, with the song of the treefrog coming thinly through the night, she turned about, climbed the three steps to her bed once more, and pulled the scented sheet over her.

Joseph had left Pendleton Hall at a little after eight o'clock, and though he did his best to hurry over the miserable road, it was nearly half past ten when he reached Mr. Perrin's plantation. The result was that though Mr. Perrin did not delay longer than was necessary to start back, it was one o'clock before he and his Negro guide reached Pendleton Hall.

Peggy, of course, had been asleep for hours while Mrs. Pendleton, leaving Cornelius to answer the door, had asked to be excused and had gone to her own

room, a good two hours before Mr. Perrin and Joseph arrived. Even Morton, tired from three days in the saddle, had told Cornelius that he was going to his room, and had asked that Mr. Perrin be brought there when he should arrive.

Peggy, sound asleep and dreaming of birthday parties, was not awakened by the arrival of the newcomer, but was, finally, vaguely conscious of something warm and soft against her foot. At first she was too sleepy to pay any attention, but finally she half realized that her kitten was purring gently to himself as he lay curled up on the bed.

"Why, Peter," she whispered. "How did you get in?"

Peter merely purred more loudly, and Peggy, more than willing to have his company, reached down to where he lay and picked him up. She put him down again where she could put her hand about him, and was almost ready to doze off once more when she became conscious of the sound of voices. She raised her head from her pillow and listened, her heart pounding furiously. From somewhere near-by she heard two men talking, their voices low.

She threw the covers back and sat up. There could be no doubt of it. Two men were talking earnestly together. She listened tensely, but could not quite make out their words. She searched with her bare

feet for her slippers and found them. Cautiously she got up and tiptoed to the door, placing her ear against it and listening. The voices were not in the hall.

She crossed to the open window and listened, but no sound save those of the tree toad and the night insects came from that section.

She stood wondering in the middle of the floor, the sound of the voices coming only vaguely to her. Neither where she was nor at the door or window did the voices sound so clearly as they had when first she had heard them as she had sat up in bed. She approached the bed once more. Yes. They were clearer now. She listened again, but Peter, comfortably curled up, arose and spoke to her with his very gentlest "Meow."

"Sh, Peter," she ordered. "Listen."

She walked to the foot of the bed, frightened and quivering, but determined. Where those voices came from she did not know. Whose they were she could not guess. But sleep was out of the question until she had satisfied herself as to how they came so plainly to her room.

Around the bed she tiptoed. She listened again, and her heart beat more heavily yet when she realized that she could hear them more clearly now. Another step and another until she was before the empty fireplace. It was from there that the voice came,

and she stooped before it to listen. She could hear them plainly now. Two men were talking, and strangely enough their voices seemed to come down the chimney.

"But I didn't send for him," she heard one say. "Heavens, man. Philadelphia is the one place he shouldn't be."

"What harm can he do?" asked the other.

"Harm? He can find that we are using him as a tool."

"Do you think he has any suspicions?"

"I don't know, but he'll have some if he asks too many questions in Philadelphia."

"Are all your papers safe?"

"They are all in code—wait! Do you suppose he could have found the ones I left here?"

"Here?" asked Perrin in surprise.

"Yes. Before I went to Philadelphia I hid some here in this fireplace."

"Heavens, man. Look and see."

Peggy was stooped, now, before the fireplace, listening intently. She had heard the conversation clearly, despite the fact that it was carried on in husky stage whispers, and she knew beyond a doubt that the two men were Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin. But now the talking ceased, and she heard some one fumbling so close to her that she drew back in fear.

That other room had always before seemed so positively detached from her own by the heavy wall that she could not understand, now, how it seemed so close.

She heard the rustle of paper, and leaned toward the fireplace again.

"Here they are," she heard Mr. Morton say, and as he spoke she heard another rustle and saw, to her amazement, a vague white something flutter down from the chimney above to the hearth at her feet.

Her heart was pounding furiously now, and she had to force herself to reach down to that vague white thing that showed so dimly in the darkness. Her fingers closed about it, and she realized that she had picked up a sheet of paper. Somehow one of the papers for which Mr. Morton had been looking had managed to fall from wherever it had been into her own fireplace.

She had crept from her bed at the sound of the voices with no idea of learning anything save where possible danger to herself lay. But now—she was in no personal danger, she felt sure. But her father! What of him? That these two had been speaking of him she knew instinctively. Did they mean him harm? Certainly they could mean him no good when they admitted that they were using him as a tool. A tool for what, she wondered.

And then she heard them speaking again.

"Are they all there?" asked Perrin.

For a moment Morton did not answer, and all she heard was the rustle of paper.

"All but one," he replied finally.

"What is missing?"

Again Morton shuffled the papers.

"Our general instructions," he grunted at last.

"In code?"

"Yes."

"Maybe it's still in the chimney."

Again Peggy heard a fumbling that seemed to be almost within arm's reach.

"Not there," said Morton finally, "but there's a hole back of where they were hidden. It must have fallen down there. I thought I felt something go when I reached in first."

"Do we need it?"

"Oh, no. I remember every detail of it. It's quite all right."

"Well then, how about Pendleton?" asked Perrin, and though Peggy knew perfectly that they had been talking of her father this mention of his name came like a shock.

"He may cause trouble," replied Morton.

"How?"

"Well, I've told him one story and have told the Maryland delegates at Philadelphia a very different one."

"If they find that out, what effect will it have on the strength of our party?"

"It will be ruinous, man. Ruinous!" replied the other. "I had them more than half convinced, but they would change in a moment."

"Then you think I'd better go after him?" asked the first.

"It's vital," replied the other. "And speed is vital. Perhaps we can keep them from discovering what we've done."

"Then I'll start at once. I thought you might want me to, and I came prepared to go on to-night. But I forgot to leave orders for pigeons to be sent. Will you attend to that? If you will I'll send a message as soon as I have anything to report."

"Good. I'll attend to it. Do you need money?"

"I have enough."

"Then go, and make all the speed you can."

Listening intently Peggy heard the men move, but listen though she would she heard nothing more, and stood with rapidly beating heart, wondering what it all meant—wondering what harm might come to her father as a result of that conversation that had come to her ears so strangely down the chimney of her fireplace—wondering what was written on that sheet of paper that she held half crumpled in her hand.

She shivered a little and searched about for her

dressing gown. She was wide awake now, and her mind was filled with questions. Her father was being used *as a tool.* What sinister meaning did that fact hold? They had said something about their "party." What could that mean? They had mentioned pigeons.

She gripped her hands tensely. The pigeon that had come from Will! It, too, bore a message about a party! *Her* party, she had thought. Could it be that Will knew what all this was about? He had carrier pigeons, she knew. Could the message she thought was meant for her have been meant for some one else? Would that explain why Will had not replied?

She shook from head to foot, partly from cold and partly from fear of the dangers that might lie in all these conflicting, muddled questions. Her father was in some danger, she felt sure. But what could she do about it? She must do something. But what? She did not know where to turn. She knew nothing positively. To tell her mother what she had heard when she knew nothing definite was merely to add more troubles to those her mother was already bearing. She could not do that. She *must* learn something more.

She tried to light her candle with flint and steel and tinder, but she could not strike a single spark,

and finally she thrust the paper into the pocket of her dress as it lay on a chair, and climbed into bed again. She pulled the pillows up about her, and sat bolt upright in the dark. Peter started purring when she awakened him, and curled up comfortably in her arms where he promptly went to sleep. She was glad he was there, for she felt very much alone, and his friendliness made her feel less as if she were trying to solve all these problems alone.

For a time her mind was fearfully muddled, and she found herself trying to think of a dozen things at once. But finally she decided to enumerate the things she actually knew, and raising one finger after another in the dark she kept count of them as she whispered them to herself.

"First," she whispered, holding up one finger, "I get a message from Will by a carrier pigeon telling me about a party—my party or some other kind, I don't know which.

"Second. I write a reply and don't hear anything from it. Of course, that may not have anything to do with what I heard to-night.

"Third. Father gets a message to go to Philadelphia—a message from Mr. Morton—and he goes."

Peter was awake again now, purring softly as she held him.

"Why can't you tell me what it's all about, Peter?"

she asked. "But you're no help at all. You even get into my room and out again without my knowing how you do it. Stop it. You mustn't stick out your claws.

"Well, then. There are three things. What's next.

"Oh, yes. Fourth. Mr. Morton comes from Philadelphia and says he never sent for Father.

"Fifth. He sends for Mr. Perrin and I hear them talking. They say they are using Father as a tool. I wonder just what they meant."

She sat silent for a moment before going on with her enumeration.

"Oh, yes. Sixth. They said something about a party. That's what gave me an idea—or did it? Yes. It made me wonder if Will knew anything about all this. And they talked about pigeons—carrier pigeons, I suppose. And Will has some. Maybe he *does* know."

She caught her breath as a new idea struck her.

"I'll *do* it," she whispered. "I'll *do* it. Come here, Peter. Can't start yet. But I'll start as soon as it gets light. If Will won't answer my message, I'll go and make him answer me."

With her mind made up she lay down again, but her mind was so filled with thoughts that she could not sleep. For an hour more she turned and twisted

wakefully, until Peter grew tired of her restlessness and jumped from the bed. Finally she did fall into a restless sleep, and dreamed of all sorts of dangers and terrors. And when she awoke it was to find the sun streaming in at the open window, to hear the early morning sounds from the servants' quarters, to hear the faint clank of a pair of oars as a fisherman made his way down Spa Creek toward the harbor and the bay.

For a moment she lay there, lazily comfortable, and then she remembered. She leaped from bed, dressed rapidly in her riding habit, hung her embroidered "pocket" at her girdle and made her way noiselessly into the hall and down the stairs.

Luckily the house was still asleep. Not until she reached the kitchen did she find a soul awake, and there, demanding her breakfast instantly, she told Cornelius that she was leaving at once, to ride to Hallwood, where she would take her noonday meal with Uncle John and Aunt Edith Taylor, and would return in the afternoon, perhaps with Cousin Will.

"You ain't gwine go all alone, is you, Miss Peggy?" asked Cornelius.

"No. I'm going to take Joseph."

"Joseph done stuck a tree limb in his eye las' night, Miss Peggy. He caint see this mawnin'."

"Then whom can I take?"

"Dey ain't nobody, Miss Peggy, 'ceptin' one of them no 'count field hands, and you caint take any of them. You gotta have a respectable *house* nigger for to go with you."

Mammy Lou came waddling into the kitchen.

" 'Clar t' goodness, Miss Peggy," she began. "Ain't never seen you up so early before."

"Get something to eat right away, Mammy Lou," ordered Peggy. "I'm going to take you to Hallwood with me. Hurry. And give me my breakfast, Cornelius."

"Yes'm," nodded the servant. "Yes'm, Miss Peggy. I'll git it right up. But it do look powerful like it's gwine t' rain, Miss Peggy."

"Don't try to frighten me out of my ride, Cornelius. I'm going whether it rains or not."

RAIN

CHAPTER IV

RAIN

PEGGY looked back at the big house as she and Mammy Lou rode out the gate, but still there was no sign of Mrs. Pendleton. The hour was early—not later than six o'clock—and though the sun was shining brightly in the east, the sky toward the west was dull and overcast. But Peggy, determined as she was to delve more deeply into the mysteries that seemed to surround her, paid no attention whatever to the weather, while Mammy Lou, long since grown too fat to be able to sit comfortably on horseback, was far too busy with holding onto the reins and maintaining her equilibrium to think of anything else.

Into Duke of Gloucester Street they rode, and turned toward Church Circle. From there they turned into West Street and made their way into the country beyond the town. Twelve miles lay before them ere they could reach Hallwood, and before a mile was passed Mammy Lou began mildly to complain.

" 'Clar t' goodness, Miss Peggy," she grumbled

finally. "I don't see what that worthless nigger had to stick a tree branch in his eye for last night."

"Why, Mammy Lou," replied Peggy. "It was dark, and he probably couldn't see."

"Well, he caint see now, that's one sure thing. At least he caint see with dat eye. It's swole clean shut."

Peggy did not reply and they rode for a hundred yards or more before Mammy Lou spoke again.

"This yere saddle ain't no good," she grumbled finally.

"What's the matter with it?" asked Peggy.

"It don't fit," explained Mammy Lou, "and it sticks into me."

Peggy smiled.

"We'd better move a little faster," she replied. "It will take us hours to get to Hallwood this way."

She touched her mount with her whip and trotted gayly along the road, not thinking to look back toward where Mammy Lou was vainly attempting to keep up. Had Peggy been less interested in the mysteries she wished to solve she might have thought more of Mammy Lou's comfort, but as it was, she was totally oblivious of the bouncing, grumbling colored woman, who was attempting to hold her reins while, at the same time, she tried her best to grip with

her hands at the horn of the sidesaddle, over which her knee was hooked.

For a mile Peggy rode briskly while Mammy Lou bounced uncomfortably along behind, and as they made their way forward it became increasingly obvious that the clouds in the west bore more than an ordinary threat. The sun had been covered by the spreading clouds, and the sky was momentarily growing darker.

" 'Cl-cl-clar t' good-ness, M-M-Miss Peg-eggy," began Mammy Lou, her voice breaking with every bounce as her horse trotted behind the girl's. "Hit su-sure do loo-look li-like rain."

"It certainly does," agreed Peggy. "Can't you ride any faster?"

" 'Cl-clar t' good-ness, M-Miss Peggy, I just c-c-caint."

"Then we're going to get wet," announced the girl. "Look. Did you see that flash of lightning?"

A low rumble of distant thunder came to them, and Mammy Lou looked frightened.

"Oh, M-Miss Peg-eggy," she groaned. "Let's us g-go ba-ack."

"Go home?" cried Peggy, "when we've come almost half way? No. I won't do it."

"We'll git we-et," complained Mammy Lou. "And we ain't half way."

She pulled her horse down to a walk and looked about her at the sky. A puff of wind rustled through the trees that lined the road, and far off among the forest leaves they heard a growing murmur.

"Hit's a storm comin', Miss Peggy," cried Mammy Lou.

"Then hurry," cried Peggy, spurring forward.

Away went the girl, her lithe young body seemingly a part of the horse that she was riding, and Mammy Lou, more concerned over her responsibility for Peggy than over her fears of riding and of the storm, struck her horse smartly and dashed after her, bouncing high from her saddle, her arms flapping like the wings of an ungainly fowl. She leaned forward and seized the horse's mane. Peggy disappeared around a curve in the road, and Mammy Lou urged her mount to even greater speed. On they dashed—Mammy Lou frightened beyond words, but somewhat less uncomfortable now that her horse had broken into a gallop. Slowly she gained on her headstrong mistress, but hardly had she done so when a blinding bolt of lightning flashed above their heads. A fearful crackling accompanied it, and an awful crash followed. Drops of rain fell, and suddenly the heavens seemed to open.

The wind came with a rush, sending the rain across the road in blinding sheets. Where, a minute be-

fore, the dusty road wound through the trees, now little rivulets of water began to collect. Puddles formed. A dead branch snapped from a tree beside the road, and crashed down just behind them.

Again and again the lightning flashed. The thunder seemed almost continuous, and Peggy, soaked now as Mammy Lou was, was forced to pull up her horse lest he slip and fall on the rough and rain-soaked road.

" 'Clar t' goodness, Miss Peggy," cried Mammy Lou. "You is all wet. We gotta find some place for to git us out of de rain."

"Then let's find it," agreed Peggy.

But look though they would they found nothing until, having ridden full two miles through the downpour, Mammy Lou spied a tiny little cabin beside the road.

"Here, Miss Peggy," she cried. "Let's stop here till de rain am over."

Peggy, almost as uncomfortable now as was Mammy Lou herself, offered no objection, and even when they found that the little cabin was deserted, that its door hung drunkenly on one hinge, that its roof leaked in a dozen places, she said nothing.

They dismounted before the door and looked in. There was nothing inside, but one corner was dry, and pushing the door open a little wider, they led

their horses in, tied them to a broken beam and looked about them.

Still the wind swept through the trees that surrounded the cabin. Still the rain fell heavily. Still the lightning flared and the thunder roared. And bare and uncomfortable though the drafty, leaky cabin was, it was infinitely better than riding through the storm.

Mammy Lou busied herself in her efforts to make Peggy comfortable. With a broken board thrust between the logs of which the cabin was built she made a place to sit down. From somewhere within her voluminous skirts she drew forth a tinder box with flint and steel. But try as she would she could not make fire, so, perforce, the two sat—wet and uncomfortable—listening to the thunder, the wind and the rain.

For a time Peggy sat idly wishing that the rain would cease, but finally, having bethought herself of the note the pigeon had brought and the slip of paper she had picked up on the hearth the night before, she opened her "pocket" and took them out.

Soaked though she had been, she had carefully protected the "pocket" beneath the folds of her voluminous riding skirt, and its contents had not been harmed. For the moment she was interested only in the paper which, as yet, she had had no opportunity

to examine, and so she unfolded it. The sheet was not large, but it was filled with an utterly unintelligible jumble of letters. They ran in rows from one side of the sheet to the other—meaningless to Peggy and not even divided into words, but unintelligible though they were, each letter was carefully and clearly formed—hand lettered and plain.

EJRMYJRYOZRODTOQRDRMFZRDDSHR
YPVSQYSOMQPMDPMNUJZDRSHARAUOMHPGG
NSAYOZPTRJREOAAOMDYSMYAUDSOAYP
SMMSQPAODSMFEOAAASMFYTPPQDDIQQAU
JOZEOYJMSZRDPGTRNRADYPNRDROXRF
ZSLRVRTYSOMYJSYVJSTARDVSTTPAAPG
VSTTPAAYPMEOAAOSZQSVSDSZIRAVJSDR
KPJMYSUAPTRFESTFAAPUFSMFPYJRT
PIYDYSMFOMHARSFRTDSTROMSMMSQPAOD
EJRMYJRRSHARSTTOBRDPMAUNUDROXOMH
SMFOZQTODPMOMHYJRDRARSFRTDSMF
YJROTQTOMVOQSADIQQPTYRTDVSMYJR
QASMGPTZSTUASMFDWIOVLQSVOGOVSYOPM
DIVVRRF

Carefully she read the letters of several lines, but not a suggestion of their meaning could she obtain. But suddenly she remembered the lines of letters that were on the back of the message the pigeon had brought. Instantly she drew the little message forth, and for the first time examined the apparently meaningless letters on its back. They were arranged as follows:

A S I O
B N J K
C V K L
D F L A
E R M Z
F G N M
G H O P
H J P Q

She looked at it hopelessly. It was as meaningless as the other. She knew, of course, that the other sheet of paper contained a message in code, for she had heard Mr. Morton say it was in code the night before. Then perhaps this jumble of letters on the back of the note from Will was in code. If that was the case then Will knew the code, and if they were the same—and they were somewhat similar, or so it seemed to her—then Will could tell her what they meant. And that made it all the more necessary for her to get to Hallwood, for somehow her father might be in danger, and these strange messages might tell her what the danger was.

She put both messages back into her "pocket" once more, and, tired of waiting, rose from Mammy Lou's improvised bench, and went to the door. A gust of rain blew in as she approached the opening and she drew back behind the shelter of the splintered door, which still stood two thirds open.

For several minutes she stood there, looking out

into the pouring rain, flinching a little when the lightning flared. Still the wind whistled through the trees. Still the rain fell in torrents. And as she stood impatiently wishing that the rain would stop, she heard the clop, clop, clop of horse's feet along the road. She peered forth, and through the rain saw two men on horseback, riding along the road toward Annapolis. Their heads were down, their capes were wound around them, and obviously both men were paying no attention to anything but the desirability of protecting themselves as much as possible from the elements.

Peggy spied them when still they had twenty or thirty yards to ride before they came opposite the cabin in which the girl had taken refuge, but before they had reached it, she heard the sounds of another horse's hoofs. The new one, she knew instantly, was coming *from* Annapolis, and more than that was galloping rapidly.

She peered forth again through a wide crack in the door which shielded her, and saw the newcomer approaching. The two men she had first seen reined their horses to one side of the road, but the other drew up as he met them, and spoke, though what he said was drowned for Peggy by a muttering of thunder.

In reply, however, one of the two men he had ac-

costed reined his horse about and pointed with his whip.

"Go about one mile farther," she heard him say, "and when you come to a fork in the road, take the turn to the left. The road to the right leads toward the Severn River. The road to the left leads to Hallwood. It is several miles beyond the fork."

The man who had asked the direction faced toward her as he thanked his director, and Peggy gave a little cry of fear. Not until that moment had she recognized any of the three, and now she saw clearly that the man who was being directed along the road to Hallwood was none other than Mr. Morton, whose code message of instructions lay even now in her "pocket."

"Mammy Lou," she whispered in fear.

The faithful colored woman was at her side instantly.

"Yes, chile," she replied. "What yo' want?"

"There's Mr. Morton," whispered Peggy. "He's after me."

"After yo'? What yo' mean, chile?"

"I have something of his," whispered Peggy nervously, while the tears came suddenly to her eyes, and one ran suddenly across her cheek. "He just asked those men how to get to Hallwood. He must have found out I have it. He must be after me."

" 'Clar' t' goodness, chile. You-all mean dat?"

"Yes, Mammy Lou. I'm afraid."

"Then we better wait till he am gone and den go back home."

Peggy peered out through the door again. The men had ridden on, and she saw Morton disappear about a curve in the road, while still the rain poured and the wind blew.

For a full minute she waited, until the road was clear in both directions, and suddenly she seized her kerchief and dried her eyes.

"I won't!" she cried suddenly, "I won't go back. I'm going on to Hallwood. I *have* to go. I won't be a coward. But, Mammy Lou, we can't go by the road. He's ahead of us. And anyway it's shorter through the woods. I know the way. Come get the horses out. We must get there ahead of him."

Mammy Lou's immediate objections were instantly overruled, with such positive determination that the colored woman quickly saw that there was but one thing to do. The result was that the two horses were led forth to where a fallen tree lay beside the road, and with that as a block from which to mount, the two climbed into their saddles.

"Now follow me," ordered Peggy, "and don't get lost."

For a hundred yards she followed after Mr. Mor-

ton along the road, and there, where an almost invisible trail led into the forest, she turned off and pulled up her horse.

"Listen, Mammy Lou," she began, "by the road it is five miles from here to Hallwood. But if we go this way it is less than four. But watch carefully, for it isn't an easy way to go."

And with no more explanation than that she touched her horse with her whip and rode off along the narrow, twisting trail, pushing wet branches aside, stooping to pass beneath low-hanging boughs, turning this way and that in a forest maze that soon had Mammy Lou both entirely lost and thoroughly frightened.

For two miles or more they rode steadily, while the rain dripped through the leaves. Long since, they had given up trying to keep dry, save as Peggy kept her "pocket" protected. They forded a stream so swollen from the rain that the horses had to swim for half a dozen yards. Out the other side they rode, and along a narrow, slippery trail that led up the steep bank. The horses slipped. Mammy Lou's mount fell to his knees and almost threw her as he struggled to his feet once more.

Through another half mile of heavy forest they rode, trotting in the open glades, twisting, turning, dodging branches where the trees grew thicker. And

finally they came to the edge of so steep a slope that even Peggy drew up her horse and wondered whether, after all, they dared attempt it.

Many times, on warm dry summer days, she and Will had ridden along that trail, and even then it took good horsemanship. And always it was difficult to go *down* that steep slope. Actually she had never done it but once before, and then it was just to show Will that she dared. When she rode with him he sometimes brought her up that slope, if the weather was fine and the trail was dry, but even under those circumstances he had never taken her down, but she, determined to show him that she was not afraid, had once ridden up the trail behind him and, at the top, had turned suddenly before he could stop her and had ridden down once more. She had been frightened, of course, but she had done it.

However, now, when she looked at the steep, water-soaked trail, with stretches of slippery wet clay showing plainly here and there along the way, she wished she had not come. And Mammy Lou, she knew, should never be permitted to make the attempt. She looked carefully down the steep, treeless slope. At the bottom the stream that normally was hardly more than six feet across, had grown to that many yards. Should her horse slip with her they would most certainly roll directly into the muddy little river, and a

plunging, kicking horse beside one in such a place meant certain serious injury—possibly more.

But Morton. He was on his way. She dared not go back to the road now. She must be there ahead of him, for if the message were taken from her she must have Will tell her what it meant. She had no choice except, of course, to send Mammy Lou back to the road, going alone down this dangerous section of the trail.

"Mammy Lou," she began, "you had better not try this. Ride back to the road and go around by the forks to Hallwood. I'll go this way."

" 'Deed I won't," objected Mammy Lou. "I goes wif you."

"No, you mustn't. You do as I say."

"I won't do it, Miss Peggy," cried the colored woman. "If you goes back by de road, I goes too. But if you goes down dis yere place, den I goes, I don't kere *what* you say."

Peggy shook her head.

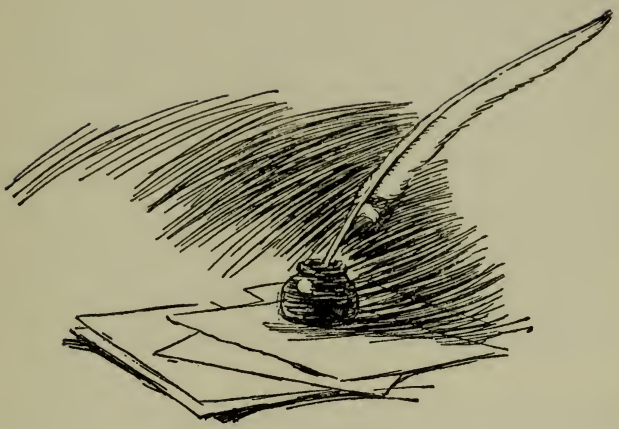
"But I *must* go this way, Mammy Lou, and you don't have to."

"I don't kere. I'se goin' if you goes."

Peggy looked back at the trail as it wound down and down for nearly a hundred yards. It *was* important. She didn't know how important, but her father was in danger. She *must* go.

Slowly, carefully, she urged her horse toward where the slope began. The beast tried to draw back—tried to turn aside. But she held the reins firmly and forced him on. His front feet were on the trail, and finally, with a touch of her whip he began the descent. A dozen yards he went, and slipped, sliding helplessly with his feet bunched until a heavy root stopped him. He was quivering with fear, and Peggy herself would almost have gone back had that been possible. Another little way he went, and slipped again, only to catch himself. For half the distance to the bottom he made his way safely. But now a steeper section of the trail lay before them. Wet, slippery clay for forty feet, and there a sharp turn, below which the stream gurgled beside the bank. Should he slip and plunge over that bank—well, no one could tell, and yet the girl urged him forward. Carefully the horse made the attempt. For half the distance he went safely, but there again the treacherous wet clay gave way. With a sickening rush the animal slid toward the turn, twenty feet below which the swollen stream gurgled. Peggy pulled hard on the reins, but the horse could do nothing. She saw the end, and suddenly dropping the reins, she threw herself clear of the saddle. She felt a heavy blow on her side—heard a tremendous splash—and the rain-soaked landscape, the steep trail and the foam-flecked stream seemed all to disappear.

FEAR



CHAPTER V

FEAR

Mammy Lou, from the top of the steep trail, had nervously watched Peggy as she had descended, unable to help, and fearful of the outcome. Several times she had cried out in fear as the girl's horse had slipped, but realizing how helpless she was to aid, she sat her horse nervously until she saw Peggy's horse slip again, saw the girl throw herself from the saddle, and saw the horse pause momentarily at the turn in the trail before pitching over the edge into the water below.

What had happened to Peggy she did not know, for, in throwing herself clear, the girl had fallen behind an irregularity on the steep slope and had not reappeared. Her horse, however, having fallen with a tremendous splash into the water, had plunged and kicked about for a moment, had struggled to the bank, and presently stood trembling violently at the edge of the stream.

But Mammy Lou, heedless of the horse, and intent only on Peggy, paid no attention to the animal's struggle, and before the beast had more than struck

the water, the colored woman leaped to the ground, and leaving her own horse safely at the top of the steep trail, ran headlong down the slope. She slipped in the slippery clay and slid rapidly for a way—rose to her feet and ran a dozen yards—slipped again—rose once more, smeared with mud—soaked—a veritable scarecrow.

Down the steep section of slippery clay she slid to where Peggy's horse had fallen to the stream, and there, rolling, slipping, she turned off toward where she had seen Peggy throw herself clear. For a moment she looked about. There she saw plainly where Peggy had fallen, for the marks were clear in the muddy bank. But leading from them down the slope were other marks that the girl had made.

Mammy Lou seized the branch of a bush that grew near-by and pulled herself to her feet. Frightened, she stared down to the stream's edge, twenty feet below, and there—muddy, bedraggled, limp, motionless—lay Peggy, one arm outstretched, the other beneath her, her feet in the water of the stream, her face streaked with mud, her hat gone and her hair awry.

Mammy Lou gave a little shriek of terror and let go the branch to which she held. Precariously keeping her feet she raced down the steep slope—falling, rising. In a moment she was beside the unconscious

girl, had Peggy's head in her lap, had brushed back the damp locks. She felt for the girl's heartbeats, and drew a breath of relief when she found them. Gently she turned the limp body to a more comfortable position—felt of Peggy's arms and legs. Again she sighed with relief, for apparently none of them were broken. And then, heedless of the falling rain, she took off her red neckerchief, which already was soaked, dipped it in the stream, and bathed the girl's white face.

For a full minute, perhaps, Peggy made no move, but under Mammy Lou's gentle ministrations, she began slowly to regain her senses. Mammy Lou noted first a slight difference in her breathing—noted then a faint fluttering of her eyelids. For a moment there were no other signs, and then—languidly—Peggy opened her brown eyes, and looked gently up at the kindly colored woman who still held the girl's head in her lap.

"Where's my 'pocket,' Mammy Lou?" asked Peggy.

"Hush, chile. It's yere."

"Don't let it get wet," said Peggy.

" 'Tain't much wet," replied Mammy Lou. "How you-all feelin'?"

For a moment Peggy said nothing, and then, with surprising strength, sat up and looked about her.

"Why," she began and hesitated. "Why—I'm all right."

"Now, chile, you-all be careful," warned Mammy Lou.

"We must get to Hallwood, Mammy Lou," announced Peggy. "Give me my 'pocket.' How did you get down here? Where are our horses?"

"Whoa, chile. Not so fast. One thing at a time. Fust, I walked down and lef' my hoss up yonder. An' he kin *stay* dere, too. Caint nobody ride a hoss down this yere place to-day."

"I think you're right, Mammy Lou," agreed Peggy. "But where's *my* horse? Is he hurt?"

"Yonder he is," directed the colored woman. "No, I reckon he ain't hurt, but he's plumb scairt stiff."

Peggy rose to her feet.

"Where you goin', chile?" demanded Mammy Lou.

"To get the horse."

"You stay wha' you is, chile. *I'll* git de hoss."

"But, Mammy Lou—"

"Do what I says, chile," ordered Mammy Lou, and started along the slippery bank to where the horse stood quivering thirty feet away.

Nor, when she returned with the animal, would she permit Peggy to make any suggestions as to their next move.

"Come on, chile," she ordered. "I'll help you git into de saddle."

"But what will you do, Mammy Lou?" demanded the girl.

"Walk," replied the colored woman. "Caint be fer now, and we kin send somebody back t' git de other hoss."

Peggy knew Mammy Lou, and recognized finality in the tone of the colored woman's voice. Thus she permitted herself to be helped into the saddle, and permitted Mammy Lou, with her hand on the bridle, to lead the way through the swollen stream, which luckily was not deep, and up the gentle slope on its farther side.

The rain still fell, but the heaviest part of the storm had passed, and to Peggy, with Mammy Lou trudging on ahead, the day seemed almost pleasant again. She had been shaken and a little bruised by her fall, but she had not been seriously hurt, nor apparently had the horse. Her "pocket," too, though it was daubed with mud, was not so soaked, she thought, as to harm the two pieces of paper within.

Through half a mile of forest Mammy Lou led the way, and finally they reached the road once more. There, beyond it and almost lost among the trees that grew upon the lawn, stood Hallwood, and within

five minutes more Peggy was helped from her horse by a group of wide-eyed Negroes.

Slowly she walked up the rain-washed steps, and before she reached the top she heard Will shout from the hall within as he ran toward her, and was more than willing to lean against him as he led her to a seat in the high-ceiled mansion.

"What on earth has happened to you, Peg?" he demanded, when she had slipped weakly into the chair.

"Has Mr. Morton come yet?" she asked.

"Morton?" demanded Will. "Who is he?"

"Mr. Morton," she repeated. "Mr. Perrin's friend."

"No," replied Will. "But tell me. What's the matter?"

"Will," she began, "it's dreadfully important. Father's in danger, I think."

"In danger of what?"

"You know the message you sent me."

"Message?" repeated Will. "I haven't sent you any message."

"The one you sent by your carrier pigeon."

"What nonsense are you talking, Peg? I haven't sent you any message. And a carrier pigeon wouldn't have taken it if I had."

Peggy looked at him astonished.

"Don't they carry messages?"

"Certainly they do, but you can't just tell a pigeon you want 'em to carry a message for you. They don't take messages away. You carry the pigeon away and then give him a message. He just flies home. That's all. I couldn't send one of them to you."

Peggy looked at him blankly.

"Then you didn't send it?" she asked as if she found it hard to be convinced.

"No. I didn't send it. But where is the message, and what does it say?"

"It's in my 'pocket,' " replied Peggy, "with another paper in code. And there's some code on the back of the one the pigeon brought."

"Give them to me," ordered Will. "And go upstairs and get some dry clothes on."

"Where's Aunt Edith?"

"She and Father went to Nottingham this morning. They won't be back until to-morrow. Not then if the weather doesn't get better. But do what I tell you. Go and get some dry clothes on. And let me see all these papers you're talking about."

A little while later Peggy descended the stairs dry and clean once more, and dressed in some of Mrs. Taylor's clothes. Mammy Lou, too, taken in hand by the colored servants, had been dressed in clean,

dry clothes, had scrubbed the mud off, and had dispatched a stable boy to find her horse and bring him in.

Will, meanwhile, had taken the two damp papers from Peggy's "pocket," and spreading them out before him had gone over them with great care. But though he had done his utmost he could not gain an inkling of their meaning, and when Peggy walked into the drawing room, where Will was still engrossed with the two bits of paper, he looked up and shook his head.

"I can't make a thing out of them," he announced. "But what's this about your father being in danger? And how did you get hold of these?"

Peggy was glad to sit down. She was only now beginning to realize how tired and shaken she was. But she was in no mood, for all her weariness, to give up in her efforts to learn the meaning of the messages.

In detail she told Will everything she knew concerning them—concerning her father—concerning Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin and the carrier pigeon and herself. And when Will had finished expressing his amazement, she turned the conversation back to the messages.

"I distinctly heard Mr. Morton say that the paper he lost was in code, and that it contained their 'general instructions,' " she explained. "But I don't know

anything about the small one except that I thought you had sent it. Your name is signed to it."

Together the two looked both messages over again.

"They were written by different people," announced Will.

"But the lettering is quite similar, just the same," objected Peggy.

Will nodded.

"Do you know what kind of a party this one means?" he asked, holding up the smaller of the two.

"I thought it meant my birthday party, and I thought you sent it," explained Peggy, "but that must be wrong. And, Will, if Mr. Morton comes you mustn't let him see these."

"But one of them is his," objected Will. "Perhaps both of them are."

"I don't care," cried Peggy. "I heard him say that he was using Father as a tool. I don't know what that means, but I'm not going to let him have his messages 'til I know my father is in no danger."

Will looked solemnly at the message.

"I think you are right," he nodded. "Let's make copies of this big one, and then we can hide the original. If they get the copy we'll still have the other. If they get the original, we'll have the copy."

Peggy instantly agreed, and together they made the most careful copy they could of the complicated code,

whereupon Will took the original to his room and hid it in the lining of an old hunting cap that he found in the bottom of a chest.

Returning, he began to reëxamine the copy they had made, and Peggy, trying now to miss nothing, suddenly seized Will by the arm.

"Look, Will," she cried. "These letters on the back of the message the pigeon brought. I hadn't noticed that before."

She held the copy before her cousin, but look though he would, all he saw were four vertical rows of letters with eight letters in each row.

A S I O
B N J K
C V K L
D F L A
E R M Z
F G N M
G H O P
H J P Q

Will looked at it blankly, and finally shook his head.

"I don't see anything," he admitted.

"Why, Will," cried Peggy. "Look. The first row reads ABCDEFGH, from top to bottom."

"By Jove," cried Will. "It does."

But then he shrugged his shoulders.

"But look at the second," he suggested. "SNVFR GHJ! What good does that do us?"

"None at all—yet," admitted Peggy. "But look at the third row. IJKLMNOP. And the fourth row is all jumbled. But the first and third give the alphabet from A to P."

Will seized the paper and looked tensely at it for a moment.

"By Jove, Peg," he cried. "I wonder."

"Wonder what?"

"Do you suppose this is the code?"

"What do you mean?"

"Here," he demanded, "give me the other paper. I'm going to try something."

"What, Will? Tell me," begged Peggy.

"Why, Peg," he explained, "if this is the code then maybe it means that to use the code you put down one letter to take the place of another. Instead of A, for instance, write S. Instead of B write N. Instead of C put down V."

Peggy let out a little squeal of excitement.

"Oh, Will," she cried, "let's try it."

And so they carefully copied the long message over again, leaving wide spaces between the lines, and when they had it done it appeared thus:

EJRMYJRYOZRODTOQRDRMFZRDDSHR

YPVSQYSOMQPMDPMNUJZDRSHARAUOMHPGG

NSAYOZPTRJREOAAOMDYSMYAUDSOAYP

SMMSQPAODSMFEOAAASMFYTPPQDDIQQAU

JOZEOYJMSZRDPGTRNRADYPNRDROXRF

ZSLRVRTYSOMYJSYVJSTARDVSTTPAAPG

VSTTPAAYPMEOAAOSZQSVSDSZIRAVJSDR

KPJMYSUAPTRFESTFAAPUFSMFPYJRT

PIYDYSMFOMHARSFRTDSTROMSMMSQPAOD

EJRMYJRRSHARSTTOBRDPMAUNUDROXOMH

SMFOZQTODPMOMHYJRDRARSFRTDSMF

YJROTQTOMVOQSADIQQPTYRTDVSMYJR

QASMGPTZSTUASMFDWIOVLQSVOGOVSYOPM

DIVVRRF

"Now, Peg," ordered Will, when they had finished, "you take the little one, and when I call off a letter that you find in the second or the fourth column, you give me the corresponding letter in the first or third. See? When I call off S, you look on the list, and give me A."

Peggy fairly wriggled with delight and excitement.

"All right," she agreed. "And then what will you do?"

"I'll put the letter you give me under the one I read, and then if it works we'll decode the message."

"All right," repeated Peggy. "Go ahead."

"E," read Will.

There was a pause as Peggy's eye ran up and down the columns.

"Why, Will," she began presently, "there isn't any E in the second or fourth column."

"Well then," suggested Will, looking over her shoulder, "maybe E stands for R. That would be just as good. You give me the letter in the second column for one I read in the first. And give me the one in the fourth for any letter I give you in the third."

"Then E stands for R," announced Peggy.

Will wrote it down.

"J," he read.

"K," replied Peggy.

"R," read Will.

Again there was a pause.

"There isn't any R in the first or third column," announced Peggy. "It's in the second."

Will looked over her shoulder again. For half a minute he studied the letters and said nothing.

"Do you suppose," asked Peggy, "that this is only part of the code?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why, look," explained Peggy, "if it's as you said in the first place, then we have letters to stand for every letter of the alphabet up to and including the letter P, and none beyond that."

Will studied the slip of paper for another moment.

"Well," he suggested, "let's try that, and when we come to a letter that isn't there we'll leave a blank space. Here. Let us copy the code over in one line. It will be easier."

He wrote down the whole alphabet, and opposite each letter up to the letter P, he placed the letter shown on the back of the message. When he had finished it looked like this:

A — S
B — N
C — V
D — F
E — R
F — G
G — H
H — J
I — O
J — K
K — L
L — A
M — Z
N — M
O — P
P — Q
Q —

R —
S —
T —
U —
V —
W —
X —
Y —
Z —

"Now," he went on, "if I'm right this makes it plain. The letters on the right are code letters, but ten of them are missing. So when we come to those we'll leave them blank. Now when I call S, you give me A, and I'll write it down. Under the letter it stands for. Let's try it."

"All right," agreed Peggy. "Start again."

"E," read Will.

"Isn't here," replied Peggy.

"J," read Will.

"H," replied Peggy.

"R," read Will.

"E," translated Peggy.

"M."

"N," replied the girl.

"Y."

"Not here."

"J."

"H," announced Peggy.

"R."

"E again," translated the girl.

Intensely interested they ran the whole length of the first line of the long message, and when they had crossed the page, and had put down every letter they could find, below the letter that stood for it in the code, this is what they had:

EJRMYJRYOZRODTOQRDRMFZRDDSHR
–HEN–HE–IME I– – I PE–ENDME– –AGE

Will picked it up and looked at it critically.

"It doesn't mean anything more that way than it did before," he objected.

Peggy frowned and looked at it carefully.

"Maybe it doesn't," she began, "but just the same you can *pronounce* some of these new combinations of letters, and the others are almost all hopeless. Look. There are several words. Hen, He, and Age. Let's try the next line. Maybe we'll learn something."

So by the same methods they set down the second line which, finally, appeared thus:

YPVSQYSOMQPMDPMNUJZDRSHARAUOMHPGG
–OCAP–AINPON–ONB–HM–EAGLEL–INGOFF

"Still no good," commented Will.

"Try the next one," suggested Peggy.

So the third line was set down, and finally it appeared in this fashion:

NSAYOZ PTRJ REOAAOMDYSMYAUDSOAYP
BAL- IMO-EHE- I LL I N- -AN-L- -AI L-O

Will grunted.

"It's no good," he remarked. "We aren't learning a thing."

"Let's try one more," pleaded Peggy, and presently another line like this was set down:

SMMSQPAODSMFEOAAASMFYTPPQDDIQQAU
ANNAPOLI -AND- I LLLAND--OOP- - -P P L-

"Still no good," grumbled Will.

"Now wait, Will," objected Peggy. "Look. If that first blank place had an S in it the first word would be 'Annapolis.' "

Will grunted again.

"Yes," he admitted. "Oh, ho. That means—if we are right—that we have to find out where to divide the words too. Look. There are three L's altogether. There must be a division between the first and the second or the second and third of them."

"Then it must be between the second and third," suggested Peggy. "I don't know any words that begin with two l's."

They struggled over the line for a time and having

decided that the first word *was* Annapolis, they decided that the letter D, in the code, must stand for S. Furthermore, there being two other D's in the code, they finally had their translation looking as follows:

ANNAPOLIS AND–ILL LAND––OOP–––PPL–

"Do you suppose that means 'Annapolis and *will land*' something?" asked Peggy.

"It might," agreed Will.

"Then what letter stands for W?"

"E," announced Will.

"Then it reads 'Annapolis and will land—,' " repeated Peggy. "What could they land that is spelled 'Blank-blank-o-o-p-s-blank?"

"Troops," shouted Will.

"Do you think so?"

"Why not?"

"Then what stands for T and R?"

"Y and T."

"Will, we're getting it," cried Peggy, as she wrote down the new code letters they had discovered. "Let's try the next line. Look at our code now."

She held up her list with the additional letters added, and Will read the following:

A — S
B — N
C — V

D — F
E — R
F — G
G — H
H — J
I — O
J — K
K — L
L — A
M — Z
N — M
O — P
P — Q
Q —
R — T
S — D
T — Y
U —
V —
W — E
X —
Y —
Z —

For fifteen minutes they struggled over it, but finally it came out startlingly dramatic, and Will let out a cheer, for what lay before them read as follows:

JOZ EOY JMS ZRDPGTRNRADY PNRDROXRF
HIMWI THNAMESOFREBE LSTOBES E I – ED

"Him with names of rebels to be seized," read Will.
"Then X stands for Z," announced Peggy.

"Yes. We're getting it, Peg. Let's do another."

They were excited now, for there was no doubt that they were gradually getting at the meaning of the message. They had forgotten everything save the thrill of the hunt for missing letters, and each new one they found made the next line easier. Already they knew twenty-one of the twenty-six code letters, and in the new line they were translating not one place remained blank. They were working rapidly now, and promptly had the line decoded as follows:

Z S L R V R T Y S O M Y J S Y V J S T A R D V S T T P A A P G
MAKE CERTAI N THAT CHARLE S CARROLL OF

which obviously read:

MAKE CERTAIN THAT CHARLES CARROLL OF

"What letters haven't we found the code letters for?" asked Will.

Peggy wrote them down in order.

"Only Q, U, V, X, and Y," she announced.

"Then the rest is easy," replied Will. "Q and X can't be used much, and we can decide whether U, V or Y are the ones we need. Let's begin at the beginning, and decode the whole thing."

In another half hour the task was finished, and there before them lay a message of fearful import. They had been thrilled and excited as they struggled

to learn what the message contained but now that it lay before them they were fearful—aghast, for the threat it bore struck at the very heart of Maryland.

"When the time is ripe," the decoded message read, "send message to Captain Ponsonby, *H.M.S. Eagle,* lying off Baltimore. He will instantly sail to Annapolis and will land troops. Supply him with names of rebels to be seized. Make certain that Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Paca, Samuel Chase, John Taylor, Edward Lloyd and other outstanding leaders are in Annapolis when the *Eagle* arrives. Only by seizing and imprisoning these leaders and their principal supporters can the plan for Maryland's quick pacification succeed."

Both Peggy and Will gasped as they read it.

"Father's name is there," cried Will.

"And my father's isn't," whispered Peggy. "But I know they mean to harm him."

"Maybe they do," nodded Will, "but he is supporting the king. That is why his name isn't here. This whole list is made up of men who are—well, this calls them rebels. Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Paca, and Samuel Chase are all in Philadelphia now—delegates, too, at the Continental Congress. And Father and Edward Lloyd are leaders, too. Both of them are Sons of Liberty, and Father has gone to Nottingham now to—"

"Sh," objected Peggy. "Don't say it. Why do

you suppose Mr. Morton doesn't come? I've been here two hours."

"Maybe he went to Mr. Perrin's plantation," suggested Will.

"How far is that from here?" asked Peggy.

"It's about a mile and a half up the road."

"What do you suppose he would be doing there?" asked Peggy. "Mr. Perrin said he was leaving for Philadelphia last night when I overheard them talking."

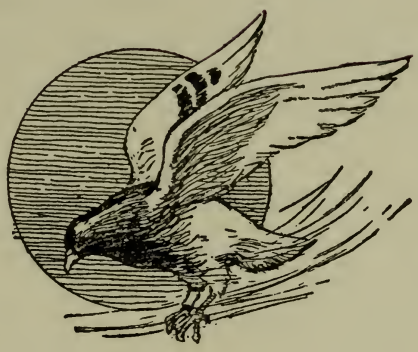
"I don't know," replied Will, still gazing at the decoded message that listed his father with others who were to be seized as rebels.

"What should we do with this?" he asked suddenly, holding up the paper.

Peggy's heart was beating heavily.

"I don't know," she replied.

SUBSTITUTES



CHAPTER VI

SUBSTITUTES

For half an hour or more the cousins sat in the dignified drawing room, frightened—fearful. They had been keenly interested—enjoyably excited when they had found the key to the code message, and no game that they had ever played had intrigued their interest more. But now, with the message lying decoded before them, they were awed by its sinister meaning—frightened by the possibilities it suggested. Intrigued by the task of finding out its meaning, they now saw how helpless they were against opponents so powerful—against plans so fully prepared—against warships and soldiers and edicts issued by representatives of a powerful government and a powerful king.

Dinner was announced, and the two ate almost in silence, fearful, frightened, worried. The rain had ceased, and through the broken clouds the sun shone now and then, throwing mottled shadows of leaves and branches onto the dining room floor below the windows. Outside, a Negro gardener and an assistant were engaged in trimming a boxwood hedge, and from the stable, hidden beyond a row of poplars, came the

sound of a Negro hostler singing. They heard the sounds of hoofs as another stable boy exercised a horse in the paddock, and Peggy suddenly realized that her mother might be worrying about her.

"Oh, Will," she said suddenly, "can't you send some one to Pendleton Hall for me? I'll write Mother a note and tell her I'm all right. She may be worrying. I'm afraid to go home. I might meet Mr. Morton, and I just *can't* talk with him. I couldn't look him in the face."

"Certainly," agreed Will. "Write your note and I'll have Job take it. Do you want him to bring anything for you?"

"Yes, if he can. I'll tell Mother what I want."

Half an hour later, with Peggy's letter in his pocket, Job trotted off down the road, bound for Annapolis, and the two cousins, somewhat more in control of themselves than they had been, returned to the drawing room once more, and helplessly began an attempt to work out some course of action for them to pursue.

"For one thing," offered Will, after screwing up his face in a thoughtful frown, "I don't believe Morton was after you at all. *I* think he was on his way to Perrin's plantation."

"What for?" asked Peggy. "Mr. Perrin started for Philadelphia last night—or this morning."

"I don't know what for," admitted Will. "But I *don't* believe you had anything to do with it, and *my* suggestion is that I get my horse and ride over there just to see what I can find out."

"And suppose he came here while you were gone?" suggested Peggy. "I'd be frightened to death."

"He couldn't hurt you."

"I know, but if you go, I'm going too," announced Peggy.

"Suppose we find him there?" objected Will. "What would you do?"

"I don't know," admitted the girl. "But I won't stay here."

"Well, if you won't stay, I suppose you'll go. I'll tell Sam to saddle our horses. But, of course, we probably won't find a thing that will help."

Peggy's heart was pounding rapidly again, and when, fifteen minutes later, they mounted their horses at the block that stood at the edge of the curving drive near the white steps that led up to the front door of the mansion, she was very much tempted to change her mind and stay behind after all. Her mouth was dry and her heart seemed almost to be in her throat —she had all sorts of vague forebodings—she had to force herself to mount the block and swing into the saddle, but she said never a word of her fear to Will, and seemed as cheerful and as gay—on the outside—

as ever she had been when they had gone to ride together.

The clouds were gone, now, and the leaves sparkled moistly in the sunlight. The wide lawn, with its white marble sundial, its curving driveway, its hedges and flower beds and trees, lay green and bright, with the shadows on it. The dignified house, framed by massive trees, stood cool and silent, looking out from its two score windows across its lawns and gardens, its paddock and its orchard. The wide steps, the graceful Corinthian columns, the classic eaves shone brightly white against the deep red of the bricks and dark and glossy green of the ivy that ran riot over half the walls. The tall chimneys raised themselves against the bright blue sky, and the gray roof seemed softly green where the moss clung faintly to the shingles. No hint in the beauty of Hallwood suggested danger of imprisonment or fear or war. But, for all that, Peggy's heart beat loudly as she gathered up her reins and touched her horse's flank lightly with her riding crop.

Into the road they turned, their horses' hoofs falling softly on the moist earth. Now and then a cake of mud flew up behind the trotting horses as the two rode onward beneath the branches of the roadside trees. Now and then they reined to one side to pass some puddle that spread itself across the road.

The air was heavy with the scent of honeysuckle, for here and there great stretches of the roadside were covered with heavy carpets of the vines, and everywhere were thousands of the cream-white bells from which the odor came. The birds were singing riotously in the woods about them. The sun was shining as if no storm had ever passed that way. A rabbit in the road ahead sat staring for a single instant as they turned a curve, and then ran straight away from them for a dozen yards, his white tail bobbing up and down until he dived suddenly into a tangle of briers and disappeared.

"What shall we do when we get there?" asked Peggy suddenly after they had ridden half a mile or so.

"Don't know," replied Will, solemnly thoughtful. "If Morton is there, well—we'll find that out anyway."

"Does Mr. Perrin live alone?"

"Yes. He has about a dozen servants at the house, though, besides his hostlers, and the men who take care of his pigeons."

Peggy frowned.

"Who takes care of the pigeons?" she asked suddenly.

"He has three men," replied Will. "One stays there all the time to look after them. He's the only one

who knows them very well. The other two carry them when they are to be used."

"Do you know these men?"

"Certainly. I bought my pigeons from Mr. Perrin, and he had his men tell me how to take care of them."

"Where does he keep the pigeons?"

Will reined in his horse and pointed.

"See that roof on the hill through the trees?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Well, that's where I keep mine. It's right at the edge of our property, and Mr. Perrin's loft is about three hundred yards farther on. It's in a better place than mine but Father thought I'd better build my loft there. It's quite a distance from the house, but so is Mr. Perrin's. I have a Negro boy who lives at my loft, and Mr. Perrin's three Negroes live at his."

"Are they there now?" asked Peggy.

"Why, Adam certainly is. He's always there. He's the one who trains them."

"Could they see us from the house if we went over there?"

"From Perrin's house? Goodness, no. It's a mile from here."

"Don't you suppose we might find out something there?"

"Maybe."

"Let's try."

They rode on for another hundred yards, and then turned off the road. Will dismounted and lowered the bars of a gate, and they found themselves in a narrow lane that led abruptly up a little hill, the top of which had been cleared of trees over an area of six or eight acres.

"This lane divides Hallwood from Perrin's plantation," explained Will. "See? Here's my loft, and there's Perrin's up yonder where the lane ends. Do you want to see my pigeons?"

Peggy's eyes were on Mr. Perrin's loft, which stood three hundred yards beyond Will's. From the boy's small loft only the roof of Perrin's larger structure showed, and she could not help wondering whether or not anything was to be learned there.

"Let's go on to Mr. Perrin's first," she suggested. "We can stop here on the way back."

Slowly their horses mounted the steep hillside, to where the loft stood boldly up against the sky.

"You see," explained Will, "the pigeons should be kept in a loft that is on a commanding site. So they can see it a long way off, I suppose. It's amazing what they do. I had Adam help me train my pigeons, and sometimes he'd take one of Mr. Perrin's and one of mine and take them off a little way, the way you

do when you are training them first. We'd release them together and mine would fly straight for my loft, and his would fly straight for his."

"Don't they ever go wrong?"

"Not if they are properly trained."

"No matter how far away they were taken?"

"*That* wouldn't make any difference."

They had reached the end of the lane, and saw, outside the door of the loft, two small crates, tied together somewhat as saddlebags are tied, apparently so that they could be carried on horseback, one crate hanging on each side of the animal while the straps that bound them together lay across the animal's back.

"They must be going to send some pigeons somewhere," explained Will. "Let's dismount."

Will tied the horses to a hitching post, and led the way to the loft.

"Oh, Adam!" he called.

"Yassah, Marse Will," replied a voice from within. "I'se comin'."

A moment later a white-haired Negro appeared at the door with a pigeon in each hand. He bowed low to Peggy when he saw her.

" 'Scuse me, ma'am," he apologized. "I didn't know nobody was with Marse Will, and he don't mind old Adam even when his hands is full ob squeakers."

"That's quite all right, Adam," smiled Peggy. "Do you call pigeons 'squeakers'?"

"Dat's what we calls de young ones, ma'am," he replied. "Dese yere ain't squeakers no mo'. Dey is growed up birds. I jest calls 'em squeakers for to make fun of 'em. But dey is two of de best birds I'se got."

"What are you going to do with them, Adam?" asked Will.

"I'se sendin' 'em to Philadelphy," explained the Negro, "and I don't like to do it."

"Why not?"

"Cause I'se got to send a no 'count nigger t' take 'em. Both Jim and John is away, an' Marse Morton he say dis mawnin' as how Marse Randolph say he gotta have 'em quick."

"Who is Marse Randolph?" whispered Peggy to Will.

"Perrin," whispered Will in reply.

"Whom are you going to send?" he continued.

"One of de house boys," replied Adam. "Cæsar is his name. He's a good house nigger, I reckon, and he know de way to Philadelphy. But he don't know nothin' 'bout pigeons."

"When is he going?"

"Yonder he come now," replied Adam.

He pointed to where a Negro on horseback was

making his way up the lane, leading another horse.

"Ef you don't mind, ma'am," continued Adam, "an' you, Marse Will, I'll jest put these yere pigeons in de crates. He's only taking four—two to Philadelphy and two to— Hold on here, you."

A pigeon had almost fluttered loose from his grasp, but the experienced old Negro managed to retain his hold.

"Go ahead, Adam," said Peggy. "I'd like to see how you do it."

Adam nodded and deposited his two pigeons in one of the crates, disappearing with a bow to get more.

"Will," whispered Peggy suddenly.

"What?"

She leaned closer and whispered in his ear.

Will blinked and shook his head.

"No," he replied, "he doesn't know one from another."

Again she whispered in his ear.

"Yes. I have twenty-two."

Once more she whispered.

"Nobody, except Adam and my boy."

"Couldn't you change your boy?"

"Yes. He wants to go back to the house anyway."

She seized him by the elbow and whispered urgently in his ear. Inside they heard Adam at his

work, and Cæsar's horse was plodding nearer and nearer up the lane. Will's face bore a frown of surprise as he listened to Peggy's excited whispers. Slowly his expression changed.

"By Jove," he whispered when she had finished. "We'll *do* it."

Adam came forth bearing two more pigeons which he deposited in the crates, and disappeared once more within the loft. Cæsar rode up and dismounted, bowing politely to Peggy and Will.

"Well, Cæsar," commented Will, "Adam tells me that you are going to try your hand at taking care of pigeons."

"Yassah, yassah," replied Cæsar, his white teeth showing as he grinned. "I don't know nothin' 'bout 'em, but dey ain't nobody else."

"Well, be careful with them," warned Will.

"Yassah, yassah, I sho' will."

Adam reappeared with some packages of food for the pigeons.

"Dere you is," he commented, locking the trap doors of the crates. "He'p me with these, Cæsar."

Together they lifted the two little crates to the back of the led horse, and Adam busied himself with making the apparatus fast. When he had finished he turned to Cæsar.

"Now all you is got t' do is t' do like I done tol'

you," he remarked. "I done put all de food up in little packages. Put one package in each crate when you feed 'em. An' don't forget to give 'em water. An' don't waste no time on de way."

Cæsar nodded and grunted his understanding and turned to mount his horse.

"Adam," remarked Will, "I wonder if you won't show Miss Peggy through your loft? She'd like to learn how to keep pigeons, because I'm going to give her some. I have to go down to my loft for a few minutes, but I'll come back presently."

"Yassah, Marse Will," nodded the old Negro, delighted to show any one through the loft for which he was responsible. "Yas'm, Miss Peggy. Yas'm. Will you-all come dis way?"

He bowed low again as Peggy passed through the door, and then turned to Cæsar who had just started off.

"Do like I tells you," he warned, "an' don't waste no time."

For a moment he watched Cæsar as he rode off, and then turned to follow Peggy into the loft, paying no attention to Will as he mounted his own horse and followed Cæsar.

For half an hour Peggy was vastly entertained by the old Negro, as he showed her all the mechanics of

pigeon flying, and of pigeon training. She listened to his highly technical explanation, to his stories of great flights, to his advice and his warnings. She examined the nests and examined the apparatus that enabled the pigeons to enter the loft when they returned from their flights without allowing them to escape. Nor had they finished the tour of inspection when Will reappeared.

"Don't you think we had better be getting back home?" he asked presently.

"Perhaps," agreed Peggy. "Thanks, Adam, for explaining all this to me."

"It am a pleasure, ma'am," he nodded. "A pleasure. Old Adam don't know much 'ceptin' about pigeons, but he *do* know them."

"There's no doubt of it," agreed Peggy. "I shall come again sometime."

The two left the loft, with Adam still bowing and nodding behind them. They mounted their horses and rode off, with another good-by to the Negro, but not until they had reached the bottom of the hill did either of them say a word. But Peggy could hold in no longer.

"Did you do it?" she asked.

"All four of them are safely in my loft this minute," he replied, "and my four best pigeons are in Cæsar's crates."

"How did you do it?"

"I got Cæsar to stop and examine some new crates of mine. Told my boy to show them to him, and while they were in the workshop on the other side of the loft I changed the birds."

"Wasn't it dangerous?"

"You mean dangerous if Perrin found out that I had been tampering with his birds?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe it was but we have to find out what those fellows are doing. There is danger there, too."

RETURN

CHAPTER VII

RETURN

Peggy and Will rode thoughtfully toward Hallwood, uneasy and frightened over what they had done. Even to them it was clear that should it ever be discovered that they had been responsible for changing the pigeons in Cæsar's crates, their names would most certainly be added to the list of the "Rebels" who were to be arrested. They had done what they had done on an impulse of the moment—an impulse that suggested a possible way to get new information from the men who so obviously were ready to go to any lengths to oppose the will of the colonists.

Peggy, of course, was the daughter of a staunch and honest Tory—the daughter of a man who was more than ready to stand by his king. Will, on the other hand, was the son of an equally ardent patriot—the son of an important leader of those who were ready to go to any lengths in their opposition to King George III. Naturally enough, both of the cousins had adopted, more or less as a matter of course, the viewpoints that they found so clearly expressed in

their homes, save that Peggy, despite her natural inclination to support the king, viewed all the trouble as unnecessary—had long since reached the conclusion that both sides were unduly inconsiderate—that each might well give way a little in order that a better understanding might result.

Yet here were the two of them—one a Tory and the other a patriot—laying plans and taking serious chances in order to oppose men who, obviously, were acting as direct representatives of the crown. That Will should do so was, of course, natural enough, for his father had for years been advancing the case of the colonists against the crown. But Peggy, despite her own individual viewpoint, had as constantly heard the case of the crown advanced, and despite her tendency to criticize both sides, she really never had imagined herself as opposing the king and the government of Great Britain.

And yet, here she was undoubtedly guilty of attempted treachery to the very king she acknowledged. Should any message of vital import be intrusted to those pigeons that now were being taken uncomfortably toward Philadelphia, it would most certainly never reach the hands for which it was intended. Instead, she and Will would open it and read it—and what would be the outcome she did not know.

All these thoughts went through her mind as she

rode silently beside her cousin, and the more she thought over the matter, the more frightened she became. What she had done—or helped to do, which in the eyes of the law is exactly the same—was likely to result in treachery to the king. She saw that clearly. Furthermore, she knew equally well that a person guilty of treachery to the king was a traitor to the king, and traitors— She shuddered. She knew what became of traitors. Furthermore her experience was limited and her imagination vivid. She closed her eyes and shuddered at the thought of the gallows and the noose.

But her father! He was in some kind of danger at the hands of these very men! What could she do but spy upon them in such fashion as was possible? What could she do save what she had already done? Where lay her first duty? To her father or her king? She did not know what the learned judges would decide, but in her mind, there was no doubt. Clearly —positively—her mind was made up on that score. Her duty above all was to protect her father, even at the risk of treachery to the king.

"But, Will," she said suddenly, as if all the thoughts that had been racing through her head had been subjects for conversation between them. "Suppose the messages that come don't tell us anything more about what we want to know. It may be that

we shall interfere with something very important and cause all sorts of trouble."

"That's simple," replied Will. "After we read the messages we can transfer them to Perrin's pigeons and let them carry them on to Perrin's loft. We don't need to keep the messages—unless, of course, they would cause trouble."

Peggy drew a long breath of relief. She hadn't thought of that solution to their problems.

"Then if the messages are quite all right we can send them on and say nothing about them to anybody," she replied.

Will nodded.

"Of course," he agreed. "You see we have to turn one of Perrin's pigeons loose each time one of mine returns, for he will keep track of the time he releases them. If he checks up afterward and finds that each time he released a pigeon in Philadelphia one arrived at his loft, he will never suspect that they have been interfered with. All I have to do is to keep close watch for my pigeons when they return. Then we'll read their messages and transfer the messages to Perrin's pigeons at my loft. Then I'll take them off a little way and release them so Adam can't see them as they rise. He'll think they've come straight from Perrin."

Peggy smiled. She felt better to know that the messages *could* be sent on if it seemed advisable.

"But, Peg," began Will suddenly, "only one of those crates is going to Perrin."

Peggy looked up in surprise.

"Where is the other going?" she asked.

"Don't know," replied Will, "but don't you remember that Adam said that Cæsar was only taking four birds, that two were going to Philadelphia, and just as he started to tell us where the other two were going one of the pigeons he was holding began to flutter, and he never finished what he started to say?"

Peggy blinked and nodded.

"I remember," she replied. "I remember. Where do you suppose they are to go?"

Will shook his head.

"Don't know," he admitted. "But we'll find out when they try to send messages by my pigeons."

They had reached and ridden into the driveway at Hallwood. A Negro hostler, seeing them approach, ran toward them to help them to dismount and to take their horses. Silently they watched the horses as they were led away, and then, still silently, they walked up the broad white steps, their minds busy with the complications and dangers among which they were struggling.

It was hardly more than an hour after Peggy and Will had returned to Hallwood that Job rode up to

the house and dismounted. His horse was lathered and wet with sweat, and stood worn with his efforts when the Negro messenger pulled him up. Nor was Job himself much less tired as he approached Peggy, who was sitting on the porch, and delivered a note that her mother had written.

"Did you bring what I asked for, Job?" asked Peggy.

"No'm, Miss Peggy," replied the Negro. "Miss Pendleton wouldn't give me nothin' but dis yere note. She was kinda worked up, Miss Peggy—kinda all worked up, and she say fo' me t' git back on my hoss an' git out here jest as fast as I could and say fo' you t' start home *at once*. She say dat, Miss Peggy, and I reckon maybe she say de same thing in what she write. She was mad, Miss Peggy. I ain't never seen her mad befo', but she's mad dis time, all right."

Peggy's heart gave a leap of fear. For the first time, she realized how thoughtless she had been. She had not thought how her mother would worry, but she realized it now.

Slowly she opened the note and read it. It said very little, but it was to the point.

"DEAR DAUGHTER," it began. "I am not sending the things you asked for, because I shall expect you to start home the moment Job arrives at Hallwood.

"MOTHER."

Peggy swallowed and looked up at Job who still stood before her.

"Will you saddle my horse and Mammy Lou's, Job?" she asked. "Bring them at once. I'll be ready soon."

She ran into the house and found Mammy Lou.

"Where's my riding habit, Mammy Lou?" she demanded.

"Upstairs, Miss Peggy," replied the colored woman. "Hit am all clean and dry and pressed agin, and so is all my clothes."

"Then get ready at once, Mammy Lou," ordered Peggy. "We must start back immediately."

"Start back?" echoed Mammy Lou. "On dat hoss? Honey, I jest caint. I'se so sore I caint hardly walk, much less climb into dat saddle again and ride to Annapolis."

"But you must, Mammy Lou!"

"But I *caint,*" wailed Mammy Lou.

"Then stay here," snapped Peggy. "But I have to go."

"You ain't goin' alone, is you?"

"Yes," replied the girl, and ran upstairs to change her clothes.

But Mammy Lou could consider no such possibility. She herself, it is true, was too sore to attempt twelve more miles in the saddle, but having found

Will, she told him the difficulty, with the result that, when Peggy reappeared at the front door, Will was ready to accompany her.

Very little was said on the way back. Peggy, conscious, now, of her thoughtlessness, felt her guilt even more than the facts warranted, and because she realized what she had done, tried now by riding at top speed, to do what she could to correct it. The result was that before three miles were passed her horse was beginning to tire, and Will, not certain of what was going on in Peggy's mind, but capable of making a shrewd guess, finally rode up to her side and, leaning over, took her horse by the bridle, slowing the mounts down to a walk.

"Look here, Peg," he warned. "I don't know what you are so glum about, but there is no use taking it out on your horse. He hasn't done anything, and you know well enough that he can't keep up that pace all the way to Annapolis."

Peggy turned her face toward him in an effort to look severe. She even tried to speak, but her feelings were too intense. She struggled to regain control of herself, but failed, and two great tears, welling up in her eyes, broke their confines and rolled swiftly down her cheeks. And now at last the words came, though not at all the words she had intended.

"Everything I do is wrong," she sobbed. "Every-

thing. Mother is angry, and you are angry, and I'm —I'm—I'm just no good, I guess."

Will stared in surprise. This was a new Peggy—a Peggy he had never seen before, and instantly he tried to calm her.

"Nonsense, Peg," he replied. "I'm not angry. I just tried to save your horse a little so you can get home sooner. And you haven't done anything wrong. Didn't you do most of the work in decoding that message? And isn't that a good day's work? You bet it is, and I'm proud of you. Come, now. Don't cry. There isn't anything wrong."

Peggy sniffled.

"Ye-yes, there is," she insisted.

"What?"

"Mother's angry."

"Why?"

"Because I came away this morning before she was up and without telling her I was going."

"Oh, that's all right. We'll tell her what we've been doing."

"Oh, no!" cried Peggy. "Don't do that. She has enough to worry about now, without having all this too."

Will frowned.

"Don't you think we'd better tell some one?" he asked.

Peggy shook her head vehemently.

"No," she replied. "Not until we know more than we do. Please, Will. Promise you won't tell any one."

Will blinked, undecided.

"Please, Will," insisted Peggy.

"Well," he replied with a shake of his head, "if you think we shouldn't, I promise."

Peggy dabbed her eyes with her kerchief and turned on him with her brightest smile.

Something over an hour later they rode into the driveway at Pendleton Hall, where Mrs. Pendleton, calmer now than she had been when she realized that Peggy was out somewhere during the height of the storm, received them quietly.

"I'm glad you're back, my dear," was all she said to Peggy, but reproof was in her tone, just as disappointment in her daughter's actions showed plainly in her eyes. "Won't you spend the night with us, Will?"

"Thanks, Aunt Emily," replied Will. "I think I'd better get back to Hallwood. I have to pick a new boy to look after my pigeons, and I want him to stay at the loft to-night. I'm going to send Peg some to keep if you can find a place for them. They aren't much trouble after they are trained. Then we can have a pigeon post between Pendleton Hall and Hallwood."

Mrs. Pendleton smiled.

"That will be very nice, Will," she smiled gently.

"I really think we ought to do it," put in Peggy. "It might turn out to be quite useful."

Together Peggy and her mother stood on the porch watching Will as he rode off, and Peggy, as she saw her cousin disappear into the street, put her arm about her mother's waist and looked up into the kindly face beside her.

"I'm sorry, Mother," she said seriously. "I didn't mean to make you worry. I won't ride off like that again, and Will can send Mammy Lou home in a day or two."

Mrs. Pendleton smiled.

"It's all right now, dear," she replied.

CHAPTER VIII

STRUGGLE

Uneasy over her part in the day's adventures, Peggy could hardly bring herself to face Mr. Morton at supper. She had learned from her mother that he had gone to Mr. Perrin's plantation that morning, and had returned so promptly that it almost suggested that he had remained there hardly at all. That he had ordered the pigeons sent to Perrin and to some other person Peggy knew. Perhaps that was the entire purpose of his ride. On the other hand he might have attended to all sorts of affairs, though Peggy could not imagine what they might be. She was more than half convinced, of course, that she had been wrong when she had imagined that Mr. Morton was in pursuit of her—that he had somehow surmised that she had found the code message that had so strangely fluttered down the chimney.

But at supper Mr. Morton gave no sign of interest in Peggy. He was polite and serious, and his conversation—what there was of it—was unimportant and addressed almost exclusively to Mrs. Pendleton.

The evening, to Peggy, was equally uninteresting,

with the result that, contrary to her usual custom, she excused herself early and went to her room. But as she left the porch, where the three had been sitting, Mr. Morton rose, mumbled something about having to attend to some business over on State Circle, and departed.

The night was warm, and Peggy's mind was occupied with a hundred things that kept her wide awake, so that, after two hours or more, she heard Mr. Morton enter his room and close the door. Faintly she heard his movements, and presently sounds that seemed to come once more from her fireplace.

She slipped from her bed, picked up her candle which she had left burning, and tiptoed toward the hearth. Still she could hear the sounds that had first caught her ear, and though her reason told her that she was in no danger, her hand shook unsteadily. The candle flame quivered and threw wavering shadows in the high-ceiled room.

But Peggy was no coward. What those sounds from the fireplace meant she did not know, but she was determined to find out, and her heart beating furiously, she leaned over the hearth, held her candle well within the fireplace, thrust her head in above the andirons and looked up.

For a moment no further sounds came to her ears,

but as she stared up the black chimney, in the light of the wavering candle flame, she suddenly made out, within a foot of her upturned face, a black hole in the chimney wall, where two bricks were missing. Beside the hole, and within a few inches of it, was a narrow shelf caused by a bend in the flue, and as Peggy examined this strange place, she saw, to her surprise, several small imprints in the thin layer of dust and soot that covered the slanting surface of the shelf. For a moment she could not imagine what had caused them, until, her eye having fallen on a clearer one, she recognized them as the footprints of a cat—of Peter, she knew, for there was no other cat about the house. What he could have been doing in the chimney she did not know, but—

She heard sounds once more—the sounds that had attracted her to the fireplace, and instantly she forgot Peter, staring wide-eyed toward that hole in the chimney wall whence the sounds seemed to come. There was silence for a moment. Once more the sound came to her ears. A few grains of mortar sifted down from somewhere, and a man's fingers crept over the edge of the hole and felt hesitantly about. Peggy's heart seemed almost to stop beating. So frightened was she that she was held rigidly where she stooped. But as she stared, the hand reached farther through the hole. She caught sight of the hairy, bony wrist

behind it, and with her hand at her mouth tried to stifle a scream.

Her candle dropped from her nerveless hand and guttered for a moment on the hearth, before it went out. She faintly saw the hand disappear quickly, and without realizing how she had come there, she found herself standing near the door leading from her room to the hall. She was quivering in every limb, but she tried to steady herself. That the hand was Morton's she knew. That she would only frighten her mother and embarrass their guest if she told of the incident, she realized. Mr. Morton could do her no harm, surely. But—

Suddenly she realized what he had been doing. It must have been in that hole in the chimney wall that he had hidden his papers. It must have been from that hole that the code message had fallen to her hearth. And Morton, missing the message, had been searching for it when her scream— Oh! If only she could recall it! Her scream had told him plainly where his lost message had gone.

For full five minutes she stood tensely holding to the door knob, before, having now regained control of herself, she crept once more into bed, and lay blinking in the darkness, fearful of a score of things that might happen—that might happen as a direct result of that tired carrier pigeon which had alighted

on the lawn only six days before. For hours she lay awake, pondering the terrible complications that had arisen, and finally fell into a troubled sleep.

The sun was high when she awoke at Cornelius's knock on the door, to learn that the household had already breakfasted. For that, at any rate, she was glad, for she missed seeing Mr. Morton, who had left the house on some business of his own by the time she had reached the dining room.

All morning Peggy sat in the summerhouse on the lawn, embroidering. She accomplished little enough, it is true. Her fingers seemed as uninterested in the task as her mind was, and her mind was wandering. Now that she had let Mr. Morton know that that hole in the chimney wall led so directly to her own room, he could not help guessing where his message had disappeared. Of course, he might feel that no serious harm could come because of the message being in code. But where formerly she had only imagined that he knew she had it, now she knew perfectly that he could scarcely help knowing that fact.

It was nearly noon before any one came to rouse her from her thoughts, but then, to her delight she saw Will Taylor, accompanied by Mammy Lou, put in his appearance at the garden gate. Mammy Lou's face showed plainly how painful her ride had been, and when the two had ridden up the driveway, and

Will had swung lightly from his saddle, Mammy Lou had to wait until the stable boy, who had come to take the horses, lifted her to the ground.

" 'Clar t' goodness, Miss Peggy," she protested, "I done rid a lot in my time, but de day am here when I caint ride no mo'. 'Clar t' goodness, chile, I'se so sore and stiff I jest caint move."

She waddled painfully off toward the house with more despatch than her words implied was possible, while Will and Peggy, half way between laughter and pity, watched her go.

Until the colored woman had passed from sight neither of them spoke, but as soon as the big lilac bush beside the house cut off their sight of Mammy Lou, Will turned suddenly, and thrust a bit of paper under Peggy's nose.

"Another message," he whispered.

"From Perrin?" she asked, her heart leaping.

"No. From the *Eagle.*"

"The *Eagle?*"

"The British ship off Baltimore."

"Have you decoded it?"

"Yes."

"What does it say?"

He pulled another slip of paper from his pocket and presented it, peering over Peggy's shoulder as she read.

"Leaving Baltimore for position off Hacketts' Point," Will's translation read. "Will notify you of arrival and await your advice concerning best time to land forces in Annapolis."

Peggy looked up in amazement.

"They're coming," she whispered.

Will nodded.

"But the other message said they weren't to come until everybody they named was here."

"Well, they may have made all sorts of changes in their plan since that first one was written," replied Will. "Anyway, this is certain."

"What should we do?" asked Peggy.

"Well, I brought one of Perrin's pigeons with me," explained Will. "Why can't we write a message of our own and send it on."

"What should we say?"

"Well, why not say, 'Must delay action,' or something like that?"

For a moment Peggy frowned at the summerhouse floor.

"How is this?" she demanded. " 'Leaving Baltimore. Will notify you of new anchorage. Delay plans for troops until next message arrives.' "

Will grunted.

"That ought to help," he admitted. "Come on. Let's put it in code and send it."

For half an hour they struggled with the code, but

finally they had prepared a businesslike message, which they thrust within the tube carried by the pigeon Will had brought.

"Now listen, Peg," the boy commented as he lifted the pigeon from the tiny crate he had brought. "If we are right about this, the message will be received by Adam in about fifteen minutes, and he will send it to Mr. Morton at once. Let's watch and see if there is a messenger here from Mr. Perrin's plantation in about two hours."

He tossed the pigeon into the air, and watched it as it circled up and up above the trees before setting its course for the Perrin plantation.

"Where's Hacketts' Point?" asked Peggy, suddenly.

"About three miles from here," replied Will.

"When will the *Eagle* be likely to arrive there?"

Will looked puzzled.

"By jove," he replied. "Hadn't thought of that."

"Hadn't thought of what?"

"Why, the ship. As soon as she arrives off Hacketts' Point some fisherman or other is going to see her and the whole town will know about it, and Mr. Morton will find out, too."

"What can we do?"

Will pushed his fingers through his black hair and sat down on the summerhouse steps.

"By Jove, Peg," he said presently. "This is serious. If the *Eagle* wants to she can bombard Annapolis and take the town. We've got to stop it."

"Stop it? How can we?"

"Can't we send them some sort of message that will frighten them away?"

"What would frighten a warship?"

For a moment Will did not reply.

"Look here," he said at last. "This ship is coming down here to arrest the leading patriots, isn't she?"

Peggy nodded gravely.

"They probably don't want to fight a battle then, do they?"

"I shouldn't think any one would want to fight a battle," replied the girl.

"But, I mean, they probably want to land and arrest the men they are after without fighting if they can. If they have to fight they aren't likely to catch the men they want."

Peggy nodded.

"I should think they would see it that way," she agreed.

"Well then," nodded Will. "If we send them a message saying the patriots know they are here and that the Sons of Liberty are making ready to fight, what will happen?"

"They might fight back," replied Peggy.

"Well, how about this, then?" asked Will. "Here's a message. 'Impossible at present to carry out plan. Citizens in arms. Suggest you leave and await further information before returning. Send word of your new position.' "

"That might do," admitted Peggy, "but how can you get the message to them?"

Will frowned.

"Hmph," he grunted. "Hadn't thought of that."

"Couldn't we send one of the Negroes?" asked Peggy.

Will shook his head.

"He'd talk about it when he got back," he objected.

Peggy shrugged her shoulders.

"Well, who *can* take it then?"

Will shook his head again.

"I'm the only one," he said presently. "I'll have to go."

"Oh, you can't, Will."

"Why can't I?"

"You might get into trouble."

"And if I don't go Father might be arrested."

Peggy looked out across the glinting water of Spa Creek.

"That's right," she agreed. "I suppose you have to go, Will."

For an hour they sat talking, and then they were called to lunch. Already they had decided that the *Eagle* would not arrive off Hacketts' Point before evening, and Will had suggested that he borrow one of the small boats that was tied up at the little wharf at the foot of the garden, with the excuse that he wanted to fish. They would prepare the message, and he would set off late in the afternoon, so he could reach Hacketts' Point before the *Eagle* was likely to arrive, and so go aboard at the earliest possible moment.

But now, at table, they had the difficult task of maintaining their equanimity before Mr. Morton who, Peggy felt, seemed more than usually interested in her. That he was wondering about his lost message and about her scream of the night before she felt certain, but his conversation was about inconsequential things, and finally the meal ended, still—so Peggy thought at least—with Mr. Morton no nearer the great secret she and Will had than before.

As Peggy and Will went again to the garden after lunch they saw a Negro dismount at the gate on the street, and make his way on foot up the driveway. Meeting one of the stable boys he asked for Mr. Morton, and, having been turned over to Cornelius, was led into the house.

"There's the messenger with our message," whispered Will.

"Are you sure?" asked Peg.

"Yes. I recognize him. That is Jim—one of Perrin's Negroes."

"What will Mr. Morton think when he has read the message?"

"I don't know," replied Will, "but if this message to the *Eagle* works, it ought to worry him a little."

It was nearly five o'clock before Will, with some fishing tackle in the small boat, set out alone on his pretended fishing excursion.

"I'll have to bring some fish back, too," he explained to Peggy as he stepped into the boat. "And don't expect me until you see me. Still, I ought not to be very late, for there's been a fair breeze from the northwest all day and the *Eagle* may anchor early after all. But if she is trying to be secret in her movements she may not anchor until dark, and in that case I won't be back until all hours."

Slowly Will rowed down Spa Creek to the harbor, and diagonally toward the point of land that hides Hacketts' Point from the sight of the people of Annapolis. He had about four miles to go, but he took his time, and it was not until nearly seven o'clock that

he reached his destination and set about trying to catch a few fish in order to have something to show for his time when he returned.

The gentle wind that had blown all day still stirred the surface of the water, but where Will's small boat lay in the shelter of Hacketts' Point, the water was almost glassy in its smoothness.

For an hour the boy fished, pulling in a finny prize now and then, but for the most part watching the bay to the north of him for a sight of the vessel he expected. But not until long after the sun had set, and dusk was turning the land and water about him to tones of gray, did he see even the slightest sign of any other vessel than his own. Nor could he, at first, make out definitely what kind of ship it was that had appeared in the dusk to the north.

Another half hour passed and the ship he had seen so vaguely at first crept closer, but still, in the gathering night, he could not be certain until he heard across the half mile of water that separated them the splash of her anchor as it was dropped into the water and the roar of her cable as it followed.

Vaguely in the dim light he had seen the sails disappear as they were furled, and though he could not be positive, he felt certain enough that the *Eagle* had arrived at last.

He drew in his lines, and got out his oars, having

determined to approach as silently as possible in order to make doubly sure that this vessel was the one for which he was waiting. But even before he made out her name on her stern he felt certain that there was no mistake, for the shipshape hull, the ports cut in her sides, the trimness of hull and rigging, all told plainly that this was no merchant ship.

Having at last convinced himself that he had made no mistake, he rowed boldly nearer, looking now for her name on her stern, but no sooner had he made it out vaguely in the gathering darkness than he was hailed.

"Boat ahoy!" came the call. "Boat ahoy! What boat is that?"

Will stopped rowing at once.

"I have a message for His Majesty's ship *Eagle,* Captain Ponsonby commanding," he answered.

"Come alongside," came the reply.

With a dozen strokes of his oars the boy was alongside. He thrust out his hand to keep his boat from bumping, grasped a line that was dropped from the deck above, and called out, "Will you send a man down?"

"Come aboard," came the reply.

A Jacob's ladder was dropped over the side, and Will, his boat made fast, climbed to the deck and was led aft to the quarterdeck. An officer approached

and peered closely at him as he held the message out.

"Who sends the message?" he demanded as he took it.

"The message will explain," replied Will. "I was told to mention no names."

"Is there an answer?"

"I was told that any answer there might be would be sent by other means."

"Will you rest before you return?"

"Thank you, no," said Will. "I am quite rested, and it is important that I return as quickly as possible."

He turned about and, reaching the Jacob's ladder, descended quickly to his boat, glad to feel its fragile safety beneath him once more—glad to be off that ship, of which, suddenly, he had developed a fear that, until he had his oars in hand once more, had not struck him. He suddenly realized the danger he had faced—gradually saw how easily something might have gone wrong, and to his own cost.

He bent his back to the oars and rowed as he had never rowed before, glad to see the *Eagle* fading into the night astern of his little boat—gladder still when, having rounded the point of land at the entrance to the harbor, he had shut off the last sight even of the riding light that glowed faintly in the *Eagle's* rigging.

It was ten o'clock by the time he tied his boat up once more at the little wharf at Pendleton Hall, and lifted the small string of fish from the bottom. They did not look too appetizing, he decided, and he trailed them in the water in an effort to improve their appearance before making his way up the garden path and exhibiting them to Mrs. Pendleton, Peggy and Mr. Morton as they sat on the porch.

"I didn't have much luck," he admitted when they laughed at his unsatisfactory catch. "Where should I take them, Peg?"

"Call Cornelius, dear," suggested Mrs. Pendleton. "He can take them."

"No need to bother him, Mother," replied Peggy, anxious to be able to talk privately with Will. "Come on, Will. Bring your monstrous catch and I'll show you where to take them."

All Annapolis was filled with excitement the following morning. With the earliest dawn, a fisherman, making his way out toward Kent Island, spied the *Eagle* as she made sail and left her anchorage off Hacketts' Point. He saw her sail boldly down to the entrance to Annapolis Harbor, where she came about and sailed slowly off into the early morning haze. The fisherman, fearful of a bombardment similar to the one the city of Norfolk, Virginia, had un-

dergone some months before, sculled his boat madly back to the town, and shouted the news of the warship's presence to every one he saw. But later, when the Committee of Correspondence decided to investigate and send a small armed schooner out to learn more of the threatening vessel, no sight of her was to be had, and no one knew whither she had gone. Nor were the patriots of Annapolis a whit more puzzled over the ship's strange action than was Mr. Morton himself. Furthermore, his surprise would not have been lessened in the least had he known that the boy who was mounting his horse in the driveway to ride to Hallwood, and the girl who sat on the summer-house steps and waved him a merry good-by that morning, were the ones who had been responsible for this most astounding series of events—events that followed so inaccurately the plans that he had made.

SURPRISE

CHAPTER IX

SURPRISE

For two days Mr. Morton worried over the miscarriage of his plans. He had received a message from the *Eagle* saying that she had left Baltimore, but no other word had come to him from her. Two messengers had ridden in from Perrin's plantation each saying that a carrier pigeon had arrived without bringing any word at all. One of the birds that had returned, so Adam reported, had been sent to Mr. Perrin in Philadelphia, but it had returned before Cæsar could possibly have reached Mr. Perrin, which suggested that, somehow, it had escaped from the crate in which it was being carried. If it had—and that was quite possible, for Cæsar knew little of carrier pigeons and might readily enough have let one escape—that would explain the absence of a message.

The other bird, however, had been sent to the *Eagle,* from which, already, one message had come. That one bird should escape was not unlikely, but that one should escape from Perrin's crate and another from the *Eagle,* was too unlikely to be plausible.

Yet both birds had come, and Adam's experienced fingers had made absolutely certain that neither had carried any message whatever.

Furthermore, Mr. Morton had given Mr. Perrin explicit instructions, before he started for Philadelphia, to see Captain Ponsonby and send the *Eagle* to Annapolis at once in order that those rebels who were in the neighborhood might be arrested immediately. It had been the desire of Mr. Morton to wait until the others should return to Annapolis, but to do so was to risk everything, for if Mr. Pendleton, in Philadelphia, should learn how he had been deceived, he would give the word and everything would be lost.

That something had gone seriously wrong Mr. Morton realized perfectly. From the time he had sent his message from Philadelphia, not a single thing had happened as he had planned. He frowned as he remembered that Perrin had told him that he had given that Philadelphia message to Mr. Pendleton. He would like to see it again, for what Perrin had said it contained and what he remembered having written were quite different.

And the *Eagle!* That Perrin had given Captain Ponsonby the instructions Mr. Morton had sent was obvious enough, for word had come quite promptly from the *Eagle* that she was leaving Baltimore. Fur-

thermore, she had appeared off Annapolis. But then something must have gone wrong, for she had left abruptly and had made no report since. And now he not only did not know where she was, but also the second pigeon that had been sent to her had returned with no message whatever.

It was all very confusing to Mr. Morton. All he knew was that something had gone wrong. He had no means of knowing that everything that had happened had originally been the result of pure accident, and that Peggy was basically responsible for all the difficulties he faced. He hardly thought of Peggy in connection with the matter. It is true that her scream had apprised him of the fact that the hole in the brickwork of his fireplace was not, as he had thought, a mere pocket in the masonry—that it was, instead, an actual opening from his fireplace to hers. Therefore it was obvious to him that the code message he had lost had fallen into Peggy's fireplace. What had become of it he had not the slightest idea, nor could he ask, for to do so would force him to explain that he had been hiding secret papers, and any questions concerning the papers might be hard to answer.

However, though he wished it were not lost, he was not unduly worried about that message, for every word of it was in code, and even if Peggy should have

found it and examined it, he felt confident of her inability to learn its contents.

Still, it was all very discouraging. The plans that he and Perrin had laid had seemed so excellent, and the rewards that had been promised were so very generous. The estates of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, of Samuel Chase and William Paca, of John Taylor and Edward Lloyd were among the richest in Maryland, and they were to be divided between Perrin and himself as soon as they could report success in their mission.

But now, somehow, things had gone wrong. *What* had happened he did not know, but that *something* had happened was as plain as the rather prominent nose that adorned his own thin face.

He rose from the chair he had been occupying on the porch of Pendleton Hall and strode down the steps and along the curving garden paths. What to do he did not know, but that something must be done was obvious. How could he get in touch with either Perrin or the *Eagle?* Without the *Eagle,* at least, he was utterly and completely helpless.

For half an hour he strode up and down the path across the garden from the summerhouse, quite heedless of Peggy who sat in the pretty white structure sewing. She was quite conscious of his presence, and it bothered her, but he was entirely oblivious of her.

The result was that finally, more than willing to be out of his sight, she left her comfortable seat and made her way down to a shady seat she knew of in the most distant and densely wooded portion of the grounds of Pendleton Hall.

Still Mr. Morton strode up and down the garden path, wondering what move he should next undertake.

And as he walked, a stranger approached the garden gate and entered. He was a young man, obviously of position, for his clothes, though simple, were immaculate. His buckled shoes were shiny black. His coat and breeches were of dark blue silk. His waistcoat was modestly brocaded, and his manner was that of a gentleman of the day. That he was new to Pendleton Hall, however, was plain from his hesitation.

He paused, apparently hoping that the thin-faced man he saw pacing solemnly up and down the path would look up, but as that did not happen, the newcomer took off his hat, crossed the lawn toward Mr. Morton, and spoke.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said. "Could you direct me to Mr. Morton who, I am told, is to be found at Pendleton Hall?"

Morton stopped his walking and looked the newcomer over.

"I am Mr. Morton," he replied.

"Good," said the young man. "I have had some difficulty finding you, sir, for I am a stranger in Annapolis."

"What is your business?" demanded Morton, abruptly.

"I am third officer of His Majesty's ship *Eagle*," replied the young man. "My name is Gordon Osborn, and I come at Captain Ponsonby's orders."

Morton looked about, as if to see whether or not any one might overhear.

"You run some risk, Mr. Osborn," he replied. "Come. Let us take this seat. From here we have a clear view all around, and thus can make certain that we will not be overheard."

The seat Mr. Morton chose was within forty feet or so of the empty summerhouse, and standing, as it did, openly in the sun, it offered, as Mr. Morton had pointed out, a clear view in every direction.

"What is your word?" demanded Morton when he had looked carefully about once more and sat down.

"I am ordered by Captain Ponsonby," replied Osborn, "to learn, if possible, what likelihood there is of his being able to complete the plan for arresting the rebels. Time is passing, and for three days the ship has been waiting off Kent Island for word from you."

"For word from me?" repeated Morton. "Why have you not let me know where to find you?"

"We sent word of our position two days since, sir," replied Osborn.

"How did you send it?"

"By carrier pigeon, sir."

"No such word has come."

"I coded the message myself, sir," insisted Osborn, "and released the bird with my own hands."

"The bird arrived," admitted Morton, "but no message was in the tube."

"No message?" echoed Osborn. "Sir, there must be some mistake. I placed the message in the tube with the utmost care."

"Still, no message was there when the bird arrived," insisted Morton. "And why, young man, did your captain appear off Annapolis and then disappear in so extraordinary a manner?"

"We followed your instructions, sir, to the letter."

"My instructions?"

"Yes, sir."

"I sent word by Mr. Perrin to *come* to Hacketts' Point," replied Morton, "but I never gave instructions for you to leave."

"Your code message, sir," replied Osborn, "came aboard within fifteen minutes of the time we anchored off Hacketts' Point."

"*My* code message? What are you talking about?"

"Why, sir," replied Osborn, obviously perturbed, "the message the boy brought, saying that it was impossible at present to carry out the plan—that the citizens were in arms, and asking us to leave at once and await further instructions. The message also asked for our new position, which we sent you by carrier pigeon."

"What nonsense is this?" demanded Morton. "I sent you no such message."

"But, sir," insisted Osborn, "it was in your own private code. I helped Captain Ponsonby decode it and there can be no doubt of it."

"I tell you I never sent such a message," shouted Morton.

"Careful, sir," warned Osborn. "We may be overheard. And I assure you, sir, that the message came as I have said."

"How did it come?"

"A boy in a small boat brought it."

"When?"

"He was apparently awaiting our arrival off Hacketts' Point. We anchored at eight-forty. He was aboard within fifteen minutes or less."

"Who was he?"

"I do not know, sir."

"What did he say?"

"Nothing save that he had a message for Captain Ponsonby—that no names were to be mentioned—that the reply was to be sent by other means—and that he was in a hurry to leave."

"You gave him no message?"

"No, sir."

"He asked no questions?"

"No, sir."

"What did he look like?"

"Why, sir, he was a gentlemanly lad of sixteen or seventeen. It was dark on deck when I saw him, and I am afraid I can give you very little more information."

"How did he reach the ship?"

"In a small boat."

"Alone?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did the boat look like?"

"I did not see it, sir," replied Osborn, "but the boatswain told me later that he had seen some fishing gear and a few fish in it as he lowered the Jacob's ladder."

"You anchored off Hacketts' Point Wednesday evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"How far is that from Annapolis?"

"About four miles, I believe. Possibly a little less."

"What time did this boy leave the ship?"

"About ten minutes of nine."

"Hm," grunted Morton, nodding his head. "I know who he was."

"You know, sir?"

Morton nodded.

"I do," he replied. "And it proves conclusively that I have been watched by the very men I was sent to arrest. I thought I had kept my plans secret, but somehow they have learned my code, sent that message, and done I know not what else."

"Who was the boy, sir?"

"His name is Taylor. He is the son of one of the colonies' principal rebels."

"What do you plan to do, sir?" asked Osborn.

Morton hesitated. He was positive that he was correct in assuming that Will had carried the message to the *Eagle*. That Will had been out alone in a small boat that evening he knew. That he had returned to Pendleton Hall at about ten o'clock he also knew. That he had brought a few fish he knew as well. Furthermore, the few details of his appearance that Osborn had given tallied perfectly with what Morton knew to be facts. It is true that he was amazed that any one should have his code, and that

any one should know such a secret as the sudden move of the *Eagle* from Baltimore to Annapolis. He could not understand how that could be, yet the fact that Will had been awaiting the arrival of the *Eagle* proved it conclusively. Furthermore, he realized that the boy must have known about it well in advance of the arrival of the ship, for the message had required preparation.

That Will was not acting alone, Morton felt certain. Nor could he believe, even for an instant, that any one other than the boy's father was the moving spirit behind the difficulty. Thus, with these conclusions clear in his mind, he decided that he must not act precipitately—that he must go carefully, lest more trouble result.

For a minute he did not reply, and when he spoke he spoke slowly.

"Return to the *Eagle*," he ordered. "I shall require time to investigate. I shall send word to Captain Ponsonby as soon as possible—possibly in two—possibly in three or four days. If you are forced for any reason to change your anchorage, let me know."

"Is there no other word, sir?"

"None."

"Very well, sir," replied Osborn. "I shall return at once."

Morton remained seated as Osborn left, still troubled, still unable to determine how or when it had been possible for the men he was opposing to learn so much of his plans and messages and code.

Osborn disappeared through the garden gate and Morton, still pondering, rose and resumed his walk about the garden paths. He was troubled, now, more than before. To come so near to wealth and success and then to fail was more than he cared to consider. Somehow there must be a way out. Some new plan must be prepared. He wished that Perrin were available.

Down to the water's edge he walked, his hands behind him, not noticing Mammy Lou as she appeared in the garden. He stood for a moment looking at the water, and then turned about, walking beside the boxwood hedge that grew along the eastern border of the grounds.

He heard Mammy Lou call to Peggy, but thought nothing of it, for his mind was busy. The colored woman called again, and faintly from a distant corner of the garden he heard Peggy reply.

Still he paid no attention, conscious only that he was approaching the summerhouse, but suddenly he caught a phrase of Mammy Lou's that brought him to an abrupt standstill—listening intently.

"De little pieces ob paper what de pigeon brought,"

he heard her call. "I found 'em when I was cleanin' up in Marse Pendleton's study."

"Bring them here," called Peggy.

"I done lef' 'em with your sewin' in de summerhouse," replied Mammy Lou.

"All right, I'll get them," replied Peggy.

Morton listened tensely. Could this, by any chance, have anything to do with him? It did not seem possible, yet it might. If he hurried he could get the "pieces ob paper" before Peggy appeared. They were probably harmless enough, but possibly—

He did not pause to carry his deductions further. He ran a dozen steps to the little garden structure, leaped up the steps at one bound, and saw two tiny slips of paper lying on Peggy's sewing basket. In an instant he seized them, slipped them into his pocket, and was once more on the lawn. He walked slowly toward the house with his hands behind him, his head bent as he had been walking during half the afternoon. When Peggy appeared with Mammy Lou it was barely to catch a glimpse of him as he crossed the porch and entered the house.

"Where did you leave the papers, Mammy Lou?" asked the girl as she reached her belongings on the summerhouse seat.

"On de sewin' basket, Miss Peggy," replied the colored woman.

"They aren't here."

"Right on de lid, chile."

"Nothing is on the lid. Come and look for yourself."

Mammy Lou looked puzzled as she searched.

" 'Clar t' goodness, Miss Peggy," she explained. "I done lef' 'em there jest five minutes ago."

"Well, they blew away then."

"I thought dey was messages like de bird brought. Dey looked de same t' me, only I couldn't read 'em."

"Where did you find them?"

"On de floor by your papa's desk."

Peggy shrugged her shoulders.

"They couldn't have been anything of mine. I have the message the pigeon brought here in my pocket. Look."

She opened the receptacle and pulled out the tiny slip of paper.

"See?"

Mammy Lou smiled.

"Yes, chile," she nodded. "I see. I reckon whut I brought you warn't nothin' after all."

But in his room on the second floor of Pendleton Hall, with the door tightly closed, Mr. Morton knew that Mammy Lou *had* brought something. Of the two slips of paper he recognized one clearly as his

own—one he had written with his own hand in Philadelphia. And on the back of it, carefully and effectively scratched out by some one, he could vaguely make out a part of his code. But the other slip was new to him. He had not written it, and yet, the two together carried the message of which Perrin had told him—the message that was partly his own, and yet had resulted in Pendleton's trip to Philadelphia, which, of all things, was what he least wanted to transpire.

He shook his head. That Will Taylor was a party to all the difficulties that had arisen he felt sure. But this strange appearance of this strange message. What did that mean? Mammy Lou had said something about "the little pieces of paper that the pigeon brought." How could she know that? How could Peggy know? Were they, as well as Will Taylor, engaged in aiding his opponents?

And Peggy, sitting in the summerhouse re-reading the tiny note she had taken from the tired pigeon that had alighted on the lawn was merely wondering, once more, whether or not she was to have a birthday party after all.

INVESTIGATION

CHAPTER X

INVESTIGATION

Will Taylor, on the morning after he had carried the message to the *Eagle* had returned to Hallwood and for two days remained there, spending practically all of his time at his pigeon loft. A pigeon had arrived some time before he reached home but it carried no message and Will could not tell whether it had come from the *Eagle* or had been released unintentionally by Cæsar, who was still making his slow way toward Philadelphia. However, one of his own birds having returned, Will released one of Mr. Perrin's, and within ten minutes was amused to see one of Adam's Negro assistants riding rapidly down the lane from Perrin's loft, obviously bound for Annapolis and Mr. Morton to bear word of the arrival of a pigeon that carried no message.

Nor had the messenger been gone more than half an hour when still another pigeon arrived, and this one, to Will's delight, *did* have a message. Carefully he decoded it, only to learn that it was from the *Eagle*, announcing that the ship's new position was in the shelter of the northern end of Kent Island,

a dozen miles or so from Hacketts' Point, and well shielded from the sight of vessels sailing in Chesapeake Bay.

Will chuckled. It would be just as well, he thought, to keep that message, and to release another one of Perrin's pigeons without giving it anything to carry. Two pigeons arriving so close together without messages would certainly cause Adam some surprise, and Morton even more. And so with a chuckle Will tucked the message into his wallet, took one of Perrin's pigeons from his loft, and walking with it for half a mile across the fields, released it at such a distance that Adam would be unable to see its spiral rise. With that done, he trudged back to the loft and resumed his watch.

All that day and the next Will remained at the loft and went again on the third morning. But hardly had he arrived when a summer storm, filled with lightning flashes and wind, came up suddenly and tore at the swaying branches of the trees. Above the hills the sky was black, and Will, wondering whether or not he would have time to walk to the house before the storm broke, was standing in the door of the loft trying to make up his mind whether to stay where he was and be certain of remaining dry, or whether to make a dash for it in the hope of being able to reach the house before the rain came.

He was still undecided when his eye was attracted toward a bird, flying hard against the rising wind. For a moment he watched it only casually, but suddenly he realized that it was a pigeon, coming from somewhere, and struggling hard to reach its loft. Whether the pigeon was one of his or one of Perrin's he could not tell. Whether the bird was making its way toward his loft or toward the more pretentious one high on the hill he had no means of knowing. The wind was strong, and came sweeping down the hill in heavy gusts. The bird, worn and tired, fought valiantly against the wind, gaining way now and then during the lulls, but stopped in mid-air or actually swept back by the furious blasts that whistled periodically down the slope.

For fully five minutes Will watched the struggling bird. At last he felt certain that it was his, for in the hundred yards that it had come since he first caught sight of it, the little creature, despite the whistling wind, headed directly toward the loft in the door of which Will stood. Hardly fifty feet now remained for the bird to fly, but it was worn. A raindrop struck the boy as he watched. Another followed and another. A flutter of sound came from the roof of the loft as a flurry of rain swept over it. A furious downpour suddenly deluged the landscape, and Will watched the wind sweep the rain in great wind rows

down the lane. He looked for the pigeon, but could not see it. He ran out despite the furious rain and searched. When last he had seen the bird it had been flying low, well within the clearing that surrounded his loft. The rain poured heavily upon him, but still he searched. The wind swept down the hill in a constant series of blasts, but still the boy hunted for the pigeon.

Gradually the wind died down. The rain fell less and less heavily, finally turning to the lightest of summer showers. Beyond the hill the sun broke through the clouds, shining brightly through the thinning raindrops and, as the blue sky broke overhead, as the last of the rain quietly ceased, Will found his pigeon, motionless and bedraggled, but alive, crouched in the wet grass within a score of yards of the loft toward which it had struggled so valiantly.

Gently he picked the little creature up and carried it to the loft. Carefully he fed it, and having made certain that it was properly cared for, he took from the tube the tiny slip of paper it contained, and heedless of his soaked clothes, unrolled it eagerly.

There was no need, this time, to decode what was written there, for it was in plain English. It was obviously from Perrin, though it was not signed, and read as follows:

"Pendleton left Philadelphia Thursday, before I arrived. I am returning at once. No news."

Will frowned. If Mr. Pendleton had left Philadelphia on Thursday, he might arrive in Annapolis any time. Of course the storm might have delayed him, but even then he would arrive no later than the morrow. The boy folded up the slip of paper and put it in his wallet. He went outside to see if any one was around, and seeing no one, he returned to the loft, caught the last one of Mr. Perrin's pigeons that he still held, and went out again, carefully locking the loft door as he departed.

Down the lane to the road he made his way, and along the road toward Hallwood, and having walked fully half way, he was about to toss the bird into the air in order that it might make its way to Mr. Perrin's loft on the hill.

But suddenly he realized that no bird could have flown through the storm that had just passed without getting wet. Adam's keen eyes would instantly detect such an unnatural condition, and he might reach conclusions too close to the truth for comfort.

Will chuckled to himself.

"Sorry, pigeon," he remarked to the bird he carried, "you won't like it, I'm afraid, but you must be given a bath in one of these puddles."

He chose the cleanest pool of rain water beside the road, and plunged the struggling bird into it and, with only its head out of water, permitted it to flap its wings for a moment. He chuckled again as he lifted the pigeon once more.

"Sorry," he said again. "But now Adam will really think that you were out in the storm."

He tossed the bird into the air and watched it circle upward.

"One more bird without a message," he thought. "Adam will begin to think that his pigeons are bewitched."

The bird disappeared, and Will trudged on toward Hallwood.

Three hours later Peggy Pendleton heard the sound of hoofs on the gravel of the driveway, and looking from the window of her room, saw Will dismount.

"Welcome, Cousin," she laughed. "Wait for me. I'll be down in a minute."

She tripped downstairs and met Will on the porch.

"Any news?" she asked.

He looked about carefully without replying.

"There is," Peggy laughed. "I'm a reader of minds. Come with me, Sir Will, to the summerhouse, and I shall hold deep consultation with you."

"I have another message from the *Eagle* and one

from Perrin," whispered Will as they made their way along the path.

"What do they say?"

"The *Eagle* is anchored off Kent Island and your father left Philadelphia Thursday. That means he ought to be here late this afternoon or to-morrow."

"Anything else?"

"Perrin is leaving Philadelphia to-day."

Will drew the messages from his wallet and handed them to his cousin.

"One pigeon came without any message, and I sent all three of Perrin's pigeons on without any," he explained.

Peggy read the notes and fell silent for a moment. They reached the summerhouse and sat down before either spoke again.

"What should we do now?" asked the girl at last.

Will hesitated and shook his head.

"I don't know," he replied. "All the pigeons have been used now, and we have no way of learning anything else about what they are doing."

Peggy frowned.

"Then if they make any more plans we can't do anything about it," she remarked. "Goodness, Will. They might send for the *Eagle* now and do as they threatened in the first place, and no one would know about it."

Will nodded solemnly.

"I think maybe we ought to tell somebody," suggested Peggy.

"Whom should we tell?" asked Will.

Peggy shook her head.

"What would Uncle John do if we told him?" she asked.

"Why, Father would go to the Committee of Correspondence at once," replied the boy. "They absolutely rule the colony, and Father thinks that they should know everything that is going on."

"What would they do to us?" asked Peggy.

"Why," replied Will, "they would make us appear at a meeting and tell everything we know."

"Would they? Honestly?" whispered Peggy, frightened at such a prospect.

"Certainly they would," insisted Will. "And they could make us come, too. And we'd have to answer. They made Governor Eden come."

"But I wouldn't want to have to go before them," objected Peggy.

"But you'd *have* to," insisted Will.

"Then we won't tell your father."

"Then whom shall we tell?"

Peggy hesitated.

"Why not—" she began, and then she hesitated.

"Why not what?" demanded Will.

"Well," Peggy began again, "I was just wondering why we couldn't write a letter ourselves to the Committee of Correspondence."

"Hmph," grunted Will. "They'd make us come before them just the same."

"Not if we didn't sign the letter," explained Peggy. "They'd have to do their own investigating then."

"But why don't you want to appear before the committee?" demanded Will. "They won't eat you."

"I know that very well," replied Peggy, "but I don't want to appear and Father wouldn't want me to either."

"Well," agreed Will, "let's write the letter then."

But before they could begin their task they were called to dinner, though they were glad that Mr. Morton had gone to the Coffee House on business. To sit at table with him was something neither Peggy nor Will cared for in the least.

But having eaten, the two returned to the summerhouse and to their self-imposed task. It took them an hour to compose the note, but when they had it completed they surveyed it proudly.

"The Committee of Correspondence," it read, "should be placed in possession of certain information for the protection of certain prominent citizens of the colony.

"There are two men, by name, Morton and Perrin, who for

some time past have been endeavoring, with the assistance of the British warship *Eagle,* to bring about the arrest of Charles Carroll of Carrollton, William Paca, Samuel Chase, John Taylor, and Edward Lloyd. These men, and other leaders, are in grave danger, for at any moment the *Eagle,* which appeared off Annapolis only last Thursday morning, and is lying off Kent Island, may return in order to carry out the plans laid by Messieurs Morton and Perrin.

"In order that the citizens of the colony may be protected from these men, it is the duty of the Committee of Correspondence to take steps against them at once.

"Mr. Morton is at present in Annapolis. Mr. Perrin will be here within two or three days. He has been in Philadelphia and is now on his way back."

"There," cried Peggy when they had finished composing it. "How is that?"

"That's a good letter," replied Will positively. "A *real* good letter. Now address it."

"There. Peggy sealed it and wrote the committee's name upon it. "It's ready to go."

"How shall we get it to them?" asked Will.

Peggy looked puzzled.

"We can't let any one see us delivering it," she said. "Can't we send it?"

"By whom?" asked Will. "Any of the Negroes would be likely to tell where they got it."

"Can't you find some little Negro child in the street and get him to take it?" asked Peggy. "Pick out a little one who doesn't know you. Wouldn't that do?"

"Where should we send it?" asked Will.

"Mr. Carroll the Barrister is a member of the committee," replied Peggy. "He lives on Green Street just a little way from Duke of Gloucester Street."

Will thought for a moment.

"I can manage it," he said presently. "I'll go over to Duke of Gloucester Street and find some little Negro child. I'll give him a penny to take the note, and can watch from the corner to see that it gets to Mr. Carroll's house. And as soon as I see that it is really delivered I'll go up Duke of Gloucester Street to Conduit Street, and return here through the back way. Write Mr. Carroll's name on the letter."

Peggy did as she was bid, and Will, putting the communication in his pocket, crossed the lawn and disappeared in the direction of the stables.

Peggy sat waiting, wondering what would happen next. She realized that the events of which she and her cousin had been a part for the past few days were important and far reaching, but she had not the slightest idea how vastly important they were. Already the colonies were in arms against the king, though as yet no battles had been fought in Maryland. That there were some who still felt that Maryland would not become active in the rebellion she knew, for her father was one of them, and from him

she had learned most of what she knew of the trouble that was brewing. But she knew, also, that there were many of the colony's best people who were insistent that Maryland join with the other colonies in a declaration of independence. Three of the leaders that Morton and the *Eagle* hoped to arrest were even now in Philadelphia as representatives of Maryland to consider such action. Some there were who considered independence impossible. How could thirteen colonies without armies or navies or even a strong central government hope successfully to oppose so powerful a nation as Great Britain? Still, even in England itself there were many prominent men who were in sympathy with the rebellious colonists.

But Peggy, though she had heard her elders talk endlessly of all these things, had made up her own mind because of very different reasons. She had heard Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin say that they were using her father "as a tool." Just what they had meant she did not know, but that they were doing something that was not to her father's best interests she realized thoroughly. Therefore she felt justified in opposing them. And furthermore, the message that she and Will had decoded had said plainly that Will's father was to be arrested as a rebel, and she liked her uncle far too well not to do what she could to

help him. It mattered not at all to her that her father and her uncle did not agree politically. She had often heard them discuss the matter, and she knew that they were the best of friends despite their different political beliefs. And Mr. Charles Carroll of Carrollton had been their neighbor all her life. He lived only a little way from Pendleton Hall in a handsome mansion that stood between Duke of Gloucester Street and Spa Creek. And she knew the others that had been named—Samuel Chase, William Paca, and Edward Lloyd. She knew them all to be fine, honest men, and she felt perfectly justified in helping them while at the same time she was helping her father and her uncle.

And anyway, she had never liked Mr. Morton—or at least she hadn't liked him since she had overheard him say that he was using her father "as a tool." She wondered what he had meant by that. But she had often wondered before, and she could not imagine. She was certain only that he was somehow making her father do something he would not do if he knew of it.

It was all very confusing. She couldn't see why, if people could not agree, they could not at least disagree pleasantly. It all seemed so simple. Nice people, it seemed to her, could disagree and still be friends, as her father and her uncle did. Why was

it that some one always had to make trouble? Why did Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin have to plot and bring warships to arrest men who were as nice as were her uncle and the others?

It was such thoughts as these that she had been thinking when she was suddenly startled to see Will standing on the summerhouse steps.

"Oh," she cried. "Have you done it so soon?"

"It was very easy," he announced. "A little Negro boy was carrying a parcel to Mr. Carroll's house when I met him on Duke of Gloucester Street, so I gave him a penny and put the letter under the string that tied the parcel. And then I saw him give it to one of Mr. Carroll's servants who was going in the gate."

"What will happen now?" asked Peggy.

"I suppose they'll arrest Mr. Morton," replied Will.

"When?"

"Why, Mr. Carroll will have to call some of the other members of the committee together, I suppose," explained Will. "They'll talk it over, and then they'll decide what to do."

"Hush," whispered Peggy. "There's Mr. Morton now."

They watched him as he entered the gate and walked slowly to the house—saw him enter, and presently saw him at the window of his room upstairs.

"Will they come here to get him?" asked Peggy in a whisper.

"I don't know," whispered Will in reply.

During all the rest of the afternoon they waited impatiently, but nothing occurred. Mrs. Pendleton sent for her carriage in order to call on a friend who lived on the other side of town. She asked Peggy and Will if they cared to accompany her, but they both begged to be excused.

"You children act like a couple of conspirators," she laughed. "What are you trying to do, Will? Make my daughter into a rebel, or is she trying to convince you that you and your father ought to support the king?"

"We aren't doing either, Mother," replied Peggy. "Where can I keep the pigeons Will is going to give me?"

"You'll have to ask your father when he gets home," laughed Mrs. Pendleton. "Good-by. I'll be back in an hour or so."

But nothing had happened by the time Mrs. Pendleton returned. Supper was announced and served. Mr. Morton, who usually paid very little attention to either Peggy or Will, conversed steadily with them during the entire meal. He asked Will what he thought of the political situation. He asked what he knew of the activities of the Committee of Cor-

respondence. He asked Will to explain his father's political beliefs, and asked what he knew of the actions of the Continental Congress that was meeting in Philadelphia.

Will almost choked, and Peggy was frankly frightened. They spoke in monosyllables, and in his nervousness Will several times contradicted himself. Had it not been that Mrs. Pendleton laughingly came to his assistance from time to time, Mr. Morton might well have learned more than either Will or Peggy cared to tell.

It was at the very height of all this troublesome conversation that a light knock came from the front door. Cornelius left the dining room, and those at table heard a mumble of words from the hall, followed by the soft sound of several pairs of feet. They heard the door to the study open, and presently Cornelius returned and went to Mrs. Pendleton's chair.

"Miss Emily," he said in a low voice. "Marse Carroll and five other gentlemans done ask can they have a private talk with Mr. Morton, and I took 'em in the study and say as how I'd find out."

"Some gentlemen have come to see you, Mr. Morton," explained Mrs. Pendleton. "Cornelius has taken them to the study. Will you send them any word? If you care to go, we will excuse you."

"I overheard Cornelius say that one of them was Mr. Carroll," replied Mr. Morton. "Which Mr. Carroll is it, please?"

Mrs. Pendleton looked questioningly at Cornelius.

"It am Mr. Charles Carroll de Barrister," explained Cornelius, "and he say that he an' some other gentlemans of the Committee of—Committee of—"

"Committee of Correspondence?" asked Mr. Morton, his face solemn and a little pale.

"Yas, sah," nodded Cornelius. "Dat am it."

"If you will be so good as to excuse me, Mrs. Pendleton," said Morton, "perhaps I'd better see them at once."

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Pendleton quietly, her own fears plain to Peggy in the little wrinkle that appeared in her brow.

Peggy and Will exchanged frightened glances. The committee had come at last, but somehow the sense of triumph over the success of their plan left them. They were afraid, and their mouths felt dry. Nor were they interested in food or in conversation, or in anything save what was about to happen in the study across the hall.

Mr. Morton rose and pushed back his chair, bowing to Mrs. Pendleton as he did so. In another moment he had crossed the hall and they heard the door of the study close behind him.

DISAPPOINTMENT

CHAPTER XI

DISAPPOINTMENT

For two hours the door to the study remained closed. Peggy and Will, fearful now of the outcome of what they had done, sat miserably on the porch. Mrs. Pendleton, knowing less than did her daughter and her nephew of the reasons for what had happened, was no less worried. She knew little or nothing of Mr. Morton's activities. She only knew that he had come to Annapolis with excellent letters of recommendation and introductions from half a dozen of Mr. Pendleton's best friends in England—that he and Mr. Pendleton appeared to be in hearty accord on all things political, and that Pendleton Hall, from the moment of Mr. Morton's first appearance in Annapolis, had been as hospitable as that exceptional place knew how.

That the Committee of Correspondence was the group of men who, during two years or more, had ruled the colony, and had not hesitated to tell even Governor Eden, until he had recently left for England, what was expected, Mrs. Pendleton knew full well. That more than one supporter of the king had

been forced to leave the colony at the behest of the committee she knew also. But what this sudden and, to her, mysterious call on Mr. Morton meant she did not know. Not knowing what Morton had been doing she naturally concluded that if he were guilty of any offense in the eyes of the all-powerful Committee of Correspondence, her husband would be held equally guilty. The results of that she could not imagine, and so was worried accordingly.

Consequently, instead of joining Peggy and Will on the porch, she went to her own room, asking Cornelius to let her know when the committee left. Thus Peggy and Will were free to carry on what whispered conversation they wished there on the porch, but somehow they had nothing whatever to say, and merely sat wondering, listening eagerly for any sound that might come from the study. But listen though they would they were able to hear nothing that they could interpret. Only once had the voices risen above a subdued murmur, and then the sounds they had heard had seemed to carry with them more of surprise than of anger. And since then they heard nothing save an occasional clearing of a throat and the low sound of voices in serious conversation.

From the trees on the lawn came the shrill cries of two insistent treefrogs. From the far shore of Spa Creek came the plaintive call of a whip-poor-will,

while from so far away up the estuary as to make it sound like only the faintest of echoes another one of the birds replied. The fireflies were unusually thick about the lawn, their flashing lights glowing and disappearing by hundreds in a never ceasing series of changing, golden brightness. From the servants' quarters came a Negro lullaby as one of the colored mothers sang a tired baby to sleep, and from the stable came the sound of a hostler plucking the strings of a crude banjo, and humming a plaintive tune that seemed to repeat and ever repeat the same short series of notes.

The moon rose above the eastern bank of Spa Creek and from where Peggy and Will sat on the stately, white-columned porch of the mansion, they could see the wavering reflection in the gently undulating waters below the garden.

For a long time they had said nothing, their minds wandering over all the exciting happenings of the preceding two weeks. But suddenly they were roused from their reverie by the opening of the study door. The voices that they had heard in a low monotone now carried more distinctly to their ears, and they heard the footsteps of the group of men as they came toward the front door and stepped upon the porch.

"Your story is astounding, Mr. Morton," they heard some one in the party say. "It puts us in a very

difficult position, but our duty is obviously to act. We have gone too far to turn back, and we must strike at every hand that is lifted against us. Thank you for your courtesy and your consideration."

There was a flurry of farewells, a series of handclasps as the party left, while Peggy and Will, making themselves as inconspicuous as possible in the chairs they occupied, sat with their eyes and ears straining to see every movement—to hear every sound.

Down the steps and along the path the Committee of Correspondence strode, while Mr. Morton, entirely unconscious of the presence of Peggy and Will, waited until his visitors had reached the gate and then laughed softly to himself. He turned about and reentered the house, but just as he disappeared they heard his sneering tones as he spoke to himself.

"Fools!" they heard him say, and then he was gone and the two astounded cousins sat staring at each other, finding it impossible to understand how these men who, they thought, had come to arrest Mr. Morton should have gone away again with such an expression of good feeling, only to be followed by that single epithet, sneered under the breath of this man of plots and codes.

For half an hour they sat discussing what was to them an astounding development. But talk though

they would they could reach no conclusion, and finally Mrs. Pendleton, her relief showing plainly in her face, came to the porch, talked pleasantly with them for a time, and then sent them off to bed.

Peggy undressed and climbed into her huge four-poster, still wondering what could possibly have taken place behind the closed door of the study. But ponder though she would she could reach no conclusion, and at last fell asleep while the moon threw a sharp pattern of shadowed leaves on the floor of her room, and marked a corner of the mahogany lowboy with a patch of radiance.

The house fell still. The crooning mother in the servants' quarters had long since sung her child to sleep. The hostler had hung his crude banjo on the wall and gone to bed. Only the treefrogs kept up their shrill cries and the whip-poor-wills their calls, while the fireflies still glowed in never ending repetition as they flew silently among the trees and flowers.

How long she had been asleep Peggy never knew, but suddenly she was aroused by three loud crashes from the heavy knocker on the front door. Through the silent house the sound reëchoed with brazen insistence, and Peggy sat up with a start. Sleep still befogged her brain and before she had cleared her mind three more crashes came from the brazen knocker. She slipped from her bed and felt about for

her slippers. Having found them she seized her robe, and in a moment she was at her window looking down to where whoever it was who was knocking stood all but invisible in the heavy shadow by the big front door.

Peggy's heart was beating heavily. Never before in her fifteen years had she been aroused by such a clatter in the middle of the night. What it all meant she had not the remotest idea, yet she was instantly afraid.

She heard some one pass down the hall outside her door, heard feet on the stairs, and heard, presently, the bolts of the heavy front door as they were shot back. She leaned from the window the better to hear what was said, and heard Cornelius as he opened the door and spoke.

"Yas, *suh*," the Negro said as he swung the door.

"I am from Mr. Pendleton," Peggy heard the newcomer say. "He has sent me to tell Mrs. Pendleton that he has arrived in Annapolis."

From the landing on the stairs Peggy heard her mother's voice.

"Why does he not come home?" she asked, her voice shrill with fear. "Why does he send you to tell me he has arrived?"

For a moment the newcomer did not speak, and then his words came slowly.

"He is being detained, madam," he replied, "by the Committee of Correspondence."

"Under arrest?" cried Mrs. Pendleton.

"Yes."

Peggy's heart leaped to her throat as she heard her mother scream. The girl dashed into the hall. Halfway down the stairs she ran, and stopped with her hand at her throat.

There lay her mother, ghastly white in the moonlight that shone through the leaded glass of the window. Silent, still, she was lying unconscious on the landing of the stairs.

Peggy was never able to remember the details of what followed. She retained a hazy recollection of Mammy Lou appearing suddenly, ridiculously unnatural in a voluminous white nightgown with long sleeves and high neck; with frills about her wrists and other frills beneath the lowest of her double chins; and to accompany the frills the colored woman had prepared her hair for the night in an infinite number of pig tails. These thrust their short and crooked lengths out in sundry directions from the black scalp on which they grew. Each pig tail held tightly in its grasp a curl paper that seemed as if it were struggling to free itself from the sinuous embrace of the kinky hair, for as Mammy Lou busied herself over her unconscious mistress her kinky locks rearranged

themselves now and again into newer and more fantastic patterns.

What else was going on in the house Peggy never quite knew, save that sleep was banished and every one was moving excitedly about, seemingly busy, but except for Mammy Lou, accomplishing nothing.

Mrs. Pendleton, under Mammy Lou's gentle ministrations, finally recovered her consciousness, and was taken off to bed by the colored woman who, by now, was quite in command of the situation. Peggy followed her mother and Mammy Lou to Mrs. Pendleton's room, but no sooner had they reached it than Mammy Lou took everything into her own hands.

"I'll ten' t' Miss Em'ly," she said gently to Peggy. "Yo' run along, chile. Dey ain't nuffin' fo' yo' t' do."

"Can't I help at all?" begged Peggy, with a feeling of helplessness and worthlessness almost choking her. "Can't I do *something?*"

"Yo' go git dressed, chile," smiled Mammy Lou, "den yo' kin do sumpin'.

"Miss Em'ly she's all right now, chile," whispered Mammy Lou so that Mrs. Pendleton could not hear what she said. "But dey ain't nobody lookin' out fer yore daddy."

Peggy caught her breath. Amid the excitement she had forgotten. Frightened at seeing her mother lying

unconscious on the landing, the girl had momentarily forgotten that her father was a prisoner.

She swallowed awkwardly and nodded.

"All right, Mammy Lou," she replied, and leaving her mother to the care of the calm and capable colored woman, she hurried to her own room, and dressed.

Just what she could do for her father she did not know. Why he had been arrested she could not tell. She had always felt that somehow *her* father could do no wrong—that no one would dare oppose him or would care to if they dared. And now the very Committee of Correspondence to whom she and Will had written only a few hours before had seized her father —had arrested him—were holding him she knew not where, charged with crimes concerning which she had not the remotest conception.

She finished dressing and went into the hall once more. The house was quieter, now, but she suddenly realized that she had not seen Will. Had he gone? Was he downstairs?

She tiptoed the length of the hall and descended the staircase. There in the hall below stood Cornelius and several other Negro servants, whispering wide-eyed to each other. They stopped the moment they caught sight of Peggy on the stairs, and stood deferentially awaiting her.

"Where is Master Will Taylor, Cornelius?" asked Peggy.

Cornelius blinked.

"Fo' de Lawd, Miss Peggy," he replied, "I ain't seen him."

"See if he is in his room," ordered the girl. "Tell him I want to see him right away. If he isn't there find out where he is."

Cornelius tiptoed up the stairs and disappeared into the shadows of the upper hall, while Peggy, uncertain what she should do now, went to the drawing room and looked aimlessly about in its unlighted emptiness. There was nothing there to hold her attention, so she returned to the hall and walked silently to the open study door.

A candle was burning on a table that stood near the empty fireplace and, to Peggy's surprise, Mr. Morton was sitting beside it, sunk deep in thought. He was untidy as if he had hurriedly dressed. His hair was awry. His coat collar was turned up awkwardly. His whole appearance told Peggy as plainly as words could have done that he had dressed quickly and that his mind was troubled by some unexpected—some very difficult problem.

His back was toward the doorway in which Peggy stood, and he did not see her, though, reflected in a mirror that hung near him on the wall, Peggy could

faintly make out the palely illuminated features of the man. That he was worried was obvious. *Why* he was worried was less clear.

For a tense moment Peggy stood looking at him, and then, hearing Cornelius as he descended the stairs, she quietly slipped backward into the hall, before turning to meet the Negro as he came down.

"Did you find him?" she asked in a whisper.

"Fo' de Lawd, Miss Peggy," replied Cornelius in a subdued voice, "Marse Will say he ain't heard a bit of all dis yere commotion. He was sleepin' so sound I had t' shake him awake. But he's dressin' now, Miss Peggy. He'll be down d'rectly."

The light of very early morning shone faintly through the fan light above the big front door, and Peggy, feeling almost suffocated there in the hall, so close to where Mr. Morton sat silently in the study, thrust back the bolt and opened the door onto the porch.

The gray, early morning haze showed indistinctly in the dim dawn light, softening the view across the lawn and through the trees to where Spa Creek lay like a mirror on which some one had breathed. From the trees came the songs and chattering of scores of birds. A woodpecker's staccato hammering echoed through the trees and stopped as suddenly as it had

begun. A catbird meowed from the tree that stood nearest the porch. From the more distant trees came the chattering and singing of a dozen different species, and far out upon Spa Creek a sea gull dived suddenly into the water, seized a fish, laboriously raised itself into the air again, and left a little circle in the water that widened rapidly upon the smooth, gray surface, spread silently to huge dimensions and disappeared.

Peggy stepped onto the porch and stood watching the miracle of the slowly growing day. Rarely had she been up before the sun, and never had she known how beautiful the dawn could be. She saw the soft surface of the stream break as a shimmering school of tiny fish swept from below, eddied aimlessly about for a moment and sank below the surface once again, leaving no sign of their passing. She heard a horse stamp faintly in the distant stables, and heard the raucous crow of a cock a quarter of a mile away.

Annapolis was silent still, and Nature seemed utterly at peace, but to the lonely girl on the white porch of the red brick mansion came a sudden rush of feeling that brought great tears to her eyes—tears that dimmed the beauty of the morning and left her frightened at the difficulties that had come. What could she do to help her father?

She realized that this dawn that she was watching as it grew before her eyes was the dawn of her own

birthday. Mirthlessly she smiled as she thought of the party for which she had hoped. The day had come, but no party had come with it. Instead, her father was a prisoner, and she knew of no one who could help her except Will.

She heard a step behind her on the porch, and turned to see Will's questioning face as he came toward her.

Coffee
House

CHAPTER XII

PURSUIT

"WHAT has happened?" demanded Will.

Peggy looked blankly at him.

"Father," she replied. "The Committee of Correspondence has arrested him."

"What for?"

"We don't know."

"Then let's go and find out."

Peggy felt her courage surge back within her. Here was action. Here was purpose. Why had she not thought of it before?

"Whom should we see?" she asked.

"Why not Mr. Carroll the Barrister?"

"Come, then," she agreed. "Let us go."

They walked rapidly down the steps and across the garden, going the shortest way to Conduit Street. Along its quiet length they walked to Duke of Gloucester Street, turning at last into Green Street, where stood Mr. Carroll's house, halfway down the hill at the foot of which lay the open space at the end of Market Slip.

Not a soul had they passed upon the way and even

now no sign of life appeared in Mr. Carroll's house. But as they approached it a puff of faint blue smoke lifted silently from a chimney at the back. Some one was awake there—that much was certain. They hesitated for a moment at the gate, and made their way slowly up the steps to the terraced lawn, and finally up more steps to the clean, white porch.

Will lifted the knocker and let it fall, twice. For a seemingly endless time they heard no answering sound, but presently the bolts were shot back, the door swung silently open, and they were greeted by a sleepy Negro, who looked dully at them.

"We would like to see Mr. Carroll," said Peggy in a small voice. "Will you tell him we are here?"

"Yo' is Miss Peggy Pendleton, ain't yo'?" asked the Negro.

Peggy nodded.

"Won't yo'-all come in?" he asked. "Right in dis room, ma'am. An' I'll see if Marse Charles kin come."

He left them in the silent drawing room, that smelled faintly stuffy because of the tightly closed windows, and for fifteen minutes they waited, whispering now and then to each other—sitting stiffly upright on the chairs they had taken—uncomfortable, nervous, afraid.

It seemed almost as if hours had passed before they

heard footsteps on the stairs. In another moment Mr. Carroll stood in the door—tall, kindly, serious, immaculate.

"I am sorry," he said as he entered, "to have kept you waiting."

"We—we have come," hesitated Peggy, "to learn about—about Father."

"Of course," nodded Mr. Carroll. "You want to see him, I suppose."

"Will you let us?" asked Peggy, pleasantly surprised at Mr. Carroll's gentleness. Somehow she had always imagined that prisoners were treated brutally—that they were loaded with chains—thrust into dismal cells—kept from their friends. This was quite different from what she had expected, and yet she had always known that Mr. Carroll was kindly. She began to feel more hopeful.

"Where is he?" she asked.

"At the Coffee House Tavern," replied Mr. Carroll. "Shall we go over there?"

"At the Coffee House?" echoed Peggy. "We thought he was under arrest."

Mr. Carroll smiled.

"He is, Miss Peggy," he explained.

"But I thought people who were under arrest were kept in jails?"

"Generally they are," he agreed, "but not always,

and in this case your father has a very comfortable room at the Coffee House. Come. Let's go. He'll be very glad to see you."

"Why was he arrested, Mr. Carroll?" asked Will as they made their way along the rough and narrow sidewalks.

Mr. Carroll frowned.

"The charge, I'm sorry to say," he replied, "is a rather serious one. We have long suspected that some one was engaged for the crown in an attempt to arrest certain leading men in Annapolis, and yesterday the Committee of Correspondence received a letter which brought about an investigation that resulted in our being told—to our surprise—that Mr. Pendleton was the guilty party. Absolute proof is lacking as yet, but the evidence we have is such as to make it imperative that Mr. Pendleton be held."

Peggy's heart leaped into her throat, and for a moment she could not speak, but finally, with an effort, the words came.

"But Father isn't guilty of that, Mr. Carroll," she cried. "We told you in the letter we wrote you yesterday who was guilty. Mr. Morton is. He has done it all. Father hasn't had anything to do with it."

It was Mr. Carroll's turn to look surprised.

"The letter you wrote yesterday?" he asked. "To whom did you write, and what did you say?"

"We wrote to you," cried Peggy, "and Will had a little colored boy deliver the letter with a package he was taking to you. We didn't sign it, but what we said was true. Why didn't you arrest Mr. Morton?"

Mr. Carroll blinked in amazement.

"Then you and Will wrote that letter?" he asked.

"Yes," cried both of them at once.

"What makes you think that Mr. Morton is guilty? He contends that he is not."

"And did he say Father was?" demanded Peggy.

Mr. Carroll frowned and hesitated.

"Yes," he replied at last. "It was on his evidence that your father was held when he reached Annapolis last night."

"But he isn't guilty," cried Peggy, "and Mr. Morton is. Isn't that so, Will?"

"Yes, Mr. Carroll," put in Will. "What Peggy says is true."

"Have you any proof of what you say?" asked the barrister.

"Indeed we have," insisted Peggy. "We can prove it all."

"Well, here we are at the Coffee House," remarked Mr. Carroll. "Now you two have your talk with Mr. Pendleton. I'll be back in half an hour or so. This is very important indeed, and I must get the other

members of the committee together. Have you your proof with you?"

"Most of it is here, Mr. Carroll," replied Will, "and we can get the rest."

He pulled out his wallet and began to open it. "I have several messages here, but there are some others that I have hidden at Hallwood. Peggy, haven't you that first message in your pocket?"

"Yes," cried Peggy, thrusting her hand into the "pocket" that hung at her waist and taking out the message. "Here it is."

"Well really," commented Mr. Carroll, "I must call the committee together. Keep your papers for the time being." He opened the door of the tavern and led his two companions in.

"Just a moment," he went on. "I'll leave instructions for you to be permitted to see Mr. Pendleton, and then I'll bring the others as soon as I possibly can."

He disappeared for a moment, leaving Peggy and Will in the empty public room, and returned with word for them to wait.

"Your father isn't dressed yet," he explained. "You see, it's really quite early, and he didn't get in until after midnight. He'll send for you when he's ready."

And with that the surprised barrister nodded and

departed, while Peggy and Will stood looking at each other.

"Isn't he a villain?" demanded Will.

"Who? Mr. Carroll?"

"No. Mr. Morton."

"Do you think he blamed everything on Father?" asked Peggy.

"Certainly," insisted Will. "They asked him about everything he wrote in the letter and he fooled 'em. Don't you remember what he said last night after they had left, when he stood looking after them? 'Fools!' he said. 'Fools!' That was all, but isn't that enough? Doesn't that show that he had told them what he wanted them to believe and that they had believed it?"

"But, Will," whispered Peggy, with her fingers to her lips, "then Father was arrested because of what we said in the letter we wrote."

Will frowned.

"Hmph," he grunted. "I reckon you're right."

"Oh, Will! We shouldn't have kept all this to ourselves for so long. We should have told some one. Now maybe we can't get Father out of the trouble we've got him into."

"Oh, I think we can," blinked Will. "I think we can."

A Negro servant came for them and told them that

Mr. Pendleton was ready for them, and nervously they followed their guide.

Mr. Pendleton, somewhat worried and tired, was waiting for them at the door of his room, and he smiled as Peggy appeared. She tried to speak, but couldn't, and for a moment her father could do no better. He took her in his arms and kissed her—patted her head for a moment, and tried to appear unconcerned when he saw the tears in his daughter's eyes.

"Well," he said at last, in an attempt to be gay, "I'm back from Philadelphia at last. How is your mother?"

"She was—she was—all right when we left the house," replied Peggy nervously. "But, Father, Will and I are responsible for your being arrested, and we've come to get you out."

"You?" asked Mr. Pendleton. "You two? Responsible for my being arrested? What nonsense, my dear."

"No, Father," insisted Peggy. "It's true. We wrote a letter to the Committee of Correspondence, telling them about Mr. Morton—"

"What is this?" cried Mr. Pendleton. "You—my daughter—wrote a letter to the committee about a guest in my house?"

"Yes, Father, we did," replied Peggy. "And we

had a good reason, too. And we have the proof. He was trying to arrange it so that the *Eagle*—that's a British warship—could come to Annapolis to arrest Mr. Carroll of Carrollton, Mr. Chase, Mr. Paca, Mr. Lloyd, and Uncle John. And we found it out. And then we got some of his messages, and we found out his code, too. And we wrote some messages ourselves and sent them, and mixed Mr. Morton and the men on the ship all up. But then we ran out of pigeons, and couldn't get any more information, and so—"

"What on earth, my child, are you talking about?" interrupted Mr. Pendleton. "You must be mad—utterly mad. Is there any sense to what you are saying?"

"But it's true, Father," insisted Peggy. "Every word of it. Isn't it, Will?"

Will nodded gravely.

"Every word of it," he agreed.

Mr. Pendleton smiled.

"Since you insist," he agreed, "I'll take your word that it is all true, but that doesn't make your statement any more clear to me. Why not begin at the beginning and tell me the whole story—slowly and carefully. Then perhaps I'll be able to understand. Up to now I'm forced to admit that I understand nothing. Come. Sit down and tell your story."

They gathered about a table in the room, and after

placing those messages they had brought with them on the table, Peggy began. For half an hour, interrupted now and then by questions from her father or comments by Will, she told the story of their adventures. She told of seeing the tired pigeon alight on the lawn at Pendleton Hall—of the message the bird was carrying and the reply that she had written. To prove her story she displayed the original message, which she had placed on the table. Next she told of overhearing Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin talking in Mr. Morton's room at night—of hearing Mr. Morton say that they had been using Mr. Pendleton as a tool. She told of seeing the piece of paper fall, apparently from the chimney, to the hearth at her feet. She told of her visit to Hallwood, and of the difficulty the two of them had had in decoding the message that had fallen from the chimney. Will exhibited a copy of the code message, together with the translation, and pointed out the code which had appeared in part on the back of the message Peggy had taken from the pigeon.

And now Will told of how he had exchanged his own pigeons for those of Perrin's—of how the various messages had come from Perrin and from the *Eagle*. Two of these he exhibited, while he explained that the third, which was hidden at Hallwood, had come from the *Eagle*, announcing her plan to come to Hacketts'

Point, there to await the time to arrest the patriot leaders.

"But you have the original message?" asked Mr. Pendleton.

"Yes, at Hallwood," explained Will. "I've hidden it with the original paper that is written in code."

The account went on. Will told of taking the message that he and Peggy had written to the *Eagle*. He told of releasing the first of Perrin's pigeons with the changed message to Morton. He told of the arrival of other pigeons—of how one had come without any word, and of how each time one of his own pigeons arrived, he released one of Perrin's. He told how he and Peggy had known of Mr. Pendleton's departure from Philadelphia, and why Mr. Morton did not know of it. And finally Peggy told of their fear, with no further way of being certain of obtaining further information, that Morton and the *Eagle* might now succeed.

"And so we wrote the letter to Mr. Carroll," she explained. "And last evening the Committee of Correspondence came to Pendleton Hall, and they were in the study with Mr. Morton for a long time. We didn't know what they were doing, so Will and I waited on the porch. And when the committee left and walked away Mr. Morton stood looking after them. He didn't see us on the porch, for it was dark.

If he had he wouldn't have said what he did. But not seeing us he thought he was safe, so as the committee walked down the path he said, under his breath, you know, 'Fools!' just as if he had fooled them. And sure enough he had. He had told them that you had done all the things we had written the committee about. Just how he did it we don't know, but Mr. Carroll told us that they arrested you on Mr. Morton's evidence. So there. Didn't I tell you that it was all true?"

Mr. Pendleton sat silent, a frown of perplexity on his brow, and before he had said a word in reply they heard footsteps in the hall outside.

"There's the committee," cried Peggy.

"Let them in, dear," suggested Mr. Pendleton.

Half an hour later the room fell silent once again.

"Gentlemen," began Mr. Carroll the Barrister, "you will agree with me that this story is astounding. You will agree, too, that we have made a serious error in detaining Mr. Pendleton. You will agree with me further, that he should be released at once. But there is one thing more that I have to suggest.

"This man Morton must be taken into custody, but I propose that before we make another precipitate move, we be thoroughly prepared. There are still two messages at Hallwood that we should have in

order to complete our evidence. If you go to your home now, Mr. Pendleton, Morton will know that you have been released. I wonder if you will be good enough to remain here until Will Taylor can go to Hallwood and return with the two missing messages? Then the committee can move for the instant arrest of Morton, and can be certain of a perfect case against him."

Mr. Pendleton smiled.

"Gentlemen," he replied, "I shall be happy to do as you suggest. I only ask permission to send word privately to Mrs. Pendleton that I have been released in order that she may be relieved of worry.

"But there is one thing more that I wish to say. You all have known me as a supporter of the crown. I have taken that stand because I believed it just. But my eyes have been opened. Mr. Morton and Mr. Perrin, both official representatives of the British government, have shown me how simple I have been. I have believed them and they have played me false. They have told me one story of their instructions and their plans, and have acted vitally different parts. These are the methods of those I was upholding, and so I uphold them no longer. I have been your opponent, gentlemen, but I shall be so no more. I respect you for your opinions, and I join you in them. You oppose the crown, and I abjure it.

"Gentlemen, henceforth I am your supporter!"

There was a flurry of conversation and congratulation. Every one talked at once, and Will, with a word to Mr. Carroll that he would hurry to Hallwood after getting his horse at Pendleton Hall, left the room where the group was talking excitedly.

It was still early—not more than seven o'clock, though to Peggy it seemed as if half the day had passed since she and Will had gone to Mr. Carroll's house. There was no one in Annapolis save the members of the Committee of Correspondence, and those who had been informed at Pendleton Hall, who knew of Mr. Pendleton's return and of his arrest. The Coffee House Tavern was only gradually awakening. The proprietors of the little city's shops were only beginning to take down their shutters preparatory to another day of business. For days, so far as the townsmen knew, Annapolis had been quiet. Not since the reported presence of the *Eagle* off Annapolis Harbor had any excitement stirred the populace. Thus it was that shopkeepers and early citizens alike turned about in surprise at the sounds of a furiously galloping horse. They stared in amazement as they saw Will Taylor ride madly along Conduit Street, as they saw him wheel dangerously around the corner and up Church Street to the Coffee House Tavern. They were amazed to see him fling himself from the

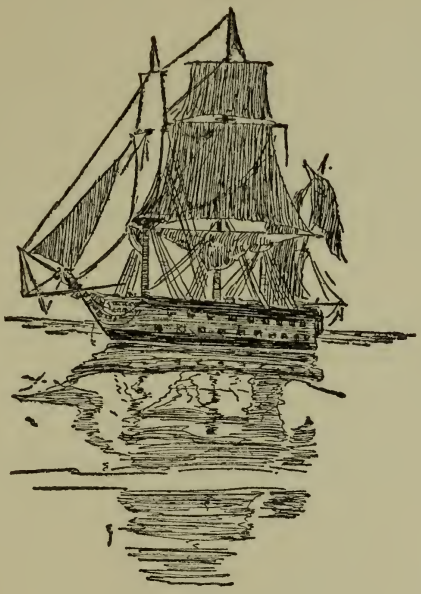
animal's back and dash precipitately through the door of the inn, bowling over a Negro servant who was busily polishing the knocker.

The horse he had ridden trotted nervously for a score of yards along the narrow sidewalk, until a hostler from the inn caught the beast and led him back to await his owner.

Yet, surprised though were the people who had seen the mad ride, their surprise was as nothing compared with that of the group gathered in Mr. Pendleton's room at the Coffee House Tavern when Will threw the door open and shouted:

"Morton is escaping," cried the boy. "He is riding out West Street with another man. I saw them as I left the stable and followed them a little way. Hurry. Get some one to follow. I'm going to keep after them. Hurry."

He dashed out the door, leaped down the dark stairs three steps at a time, ran across the public room below, and almost from the bottom step of the inn, threw himself upon his horse. He reined the animal about, spurred him furiously and rushed headlong up Church Street. About Church Circle he rode madly, turning into West Street, and spurring again; for there, far ahead of him, almost lost to sight, were the two figures he was following.



CHAPTER XIII

CAPTURE

THROUGHOUT the Coffee House Tavern pandemonium reigned. Down the dark stairs from the second floor ran the members of the Committee of Correspondence. Excited voices shouted for the landlord. Negro servants scurried about on hurried errands, or were sent running to find additional nearby patriots.

Horses were hurriedly saddled in the tavern stable. A crowd of excited townspeople gathered at the tavern door, asking eager questions, awkwardly attempting to expedite matters and getting in the way. Now and then some armed and mounted man, called by some one of the scurrying messengers, rode up to where the crowd at the door overflowed onto the sidewalk and into the street, and demanded to know what he should do.

With remarkable expedition a dozen mounted men collected and with their orders rapidly given them by the committee, spurred their horses and clattered off up the hill toward Church Circle and West Street.

Far in the lead Morton rode with his companion, confident as yet that no one had learned of his duplicity.

"I have failed, I'm afraid," he growled. "Somehow some one among these rebels learned of our plans, yet for the life of me I cannot understand what happened. That young whipper-snapper, Will Taylor, who brought you the message when you lay off Hacketts' Point, is the son of one of their leaders, and yet the Committee of Correspondence which paid me the honor of a visit last night, knew nothing whatever about it. Some one had evidently written them a letter, telling them vaguely of our plans, but because of the ease with which I laid the blame elsewhere I am confident that they had very little information."

"But now you tell me Pendleton has returned," replied his companion. "What can he tell them?"

Morton laughed.

"Little enough," he grumbled. "Until he has been able to clear himself—if he can—of certain charges I made against him, his word will not be taken for much anyway. And besides—I've told him nothing of our real plans. The only trouble there is that it has forced our hand."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Listen, Osborn," explained Morton. "When I

sent for you last evening it was just after the committee had called on me. I planned to have a talk with you in order that we might work out some way for the *Eagle* to appear suddenly and take these men into custody. You see, I did not know that Pendleton was about to return, and so I threw the blame on him, thinking thereby to gain the two or three days that we require. But within a few hours of my sending for you Pendleton reached Annapolis and was arrested. To-day they will undoubtedly hold some sort of an investigation, and naturally they will send for me. I have no desire to appear. Therefore I waited only until you came, and here we are."

"What do you plan to do, sir?"

"Where is the *Eagle?*"

"She is lying off Arundel, at the mouth of South River."

"How far from here?"

"Perhaps five miles, the way we have to go."

"Then let us hurry. The moment we get aboard I want Captain Ponsonby to sail for Annapolis. With good fortune we can capture the entire Committee of Correspondence. Perhaps we can take over the town."

Osborn frowned.

"They'll be able to see us for an hour before we can land," he remarked.

Morton caught a sound behind them and looked over his shoulder.

"Some one is following us," he growled.

"We turn off the main road presently," replied Osborn. "Perhaps he'll keep on. He will if he isn't on our trail."

The two spurred their horses into a faster trot, and after a minute or so, reined off the road into a narrow path that wound through the woods. Along it to its first turn they rode, and there drew rein, listening.

They heard the rider they had seen, as he approached the path and stopped. Hidden in the woods they could not see what he was doing, but that he was engaged in some task they could tell plainly.

"What can he be doing?" asked Morton.

Osborn listened for a moment and then dismounted.

"If you will hold my horse, sir," he replied, "I'll try to find out."

He crept away along the path, and full five minutes passed before he reappeared.

"What is he doing?" asked Morton again.

Osborn shook his head.

"I could not make sure without exposing myself," he replied. "He was doing something with a sapling. What it was I don't know, but I believe he is the same boy who brought the message to the *Eagle*."

"Will Taylor, eh?" grumbled Morton. "Do you suppose he is following us?"

"Should we wait and see?" asked Osborn.

"Yes. And if he is, let us catch him," snapped Morton.

"What shall we do with him?"

"Take him to the *Eagle*. He has made trouble enough."

They rode on until they rounded a bend in the trail, and there dismounted.

"Let us tie the horses to one of these trees," suggested Osborn. "We can go back to where we were waiting. The trail bends there, and we can hide in the bushes. As he rides around the bend we can stop him."

"How?" demanded Morton.

"I'll leap out and seize his bridle," replied Osborn. "You can cover him with one of my pistols."

"Very well," nodded Morton. "Give me the gun."

They crept back along the trail and listened intently. Evidently Will had finished his self-imposed task, for they heard the squeak of his saddle as he mounted his horse. Then came the soft sound of the horse's hoofs as the animal picked its way along the narrow trail among the bushes and the trees.

Morton and Osborn crouched silently behind the bush that shielded them, listening as the rider came

closer along the forest path. A squirrel ran up a near-by tree, stopped for a moment, and scolded the two crouching men who had interrupted his feeding. An oriole flashed its vivid colors through the leaves overhead.

Mr. Morton frowned and rubbed his cheek where a mosquito bit him, listening intently to the approaching horse. Will was hardly a dozen paces distant now, and they distinctly heard him as he cleared his throat. Had they been less intent on the approaching boy they might have heard, very faintly in the distance, the sounds of other horses' feet far away on the road, but now Will was almost upon them, and other sounds meant nothing. Another yard, another foot, and Osborn leaped. There was a crash of branches as he sprung past the bush. Will's horse reared and snorted loud in fear. He lunged and tried to turn, but now it was too late, for Osborn, grim and sturdy, had seized the bridle.

Will struck blindly with his riding crop, bringing it down heavily upon the naval officer's shoulders, but suddenly he stopped, for there beside him stood Morton, with his pistol raised.

"Stop it," growled Morton. "You have made trouble enough. Lead his horse, Osborn. I'll follow. And you, Taylor, do as you are told. We have neither time nor patience to waste."

"What are you trying to do?" shouted Will. "I'll not be set upon—"

"Silence!" cried Morton. "Do as you are told."

Will saw how utterly helpless he was. Until that moment he had not realized that his very life might pay for the part that he had played. Perhaps, he thought, he had better do as he was told. Help would come, he knew. He was glad that he had told the committee that he was following Morton. And they couldn't possibly fail to see the sign that he had made with the sapling, pointing the way to this obscure woodland trail. He almost smiled to himself. This adventure was worth having after all.

Osborn led the way to where the two horses were waiting. There was a moment's hesitation as the two mounted after having made certain that Will was unarmed. Osborn even took the boy's riding crop from him, and his reins as well.

"Lead the way, Osborn," ordered Morton. "And lead his horse. I'll follow. And you, Taylor, do as you are told. I intend to keep you covered with this pistol, and your guide has another. Now. Go ahead."

Will had listened intently as the two were mounting, and his heart beat heavily with excitement, for he heard the distant sound of hoofs and voices on the road. Silence had followed for a moment, and

then came a shout and the sound of a broken branch.

"Hurry, Osborn," growled Morton. "We are being followed."

The naval officer thrust his heels against his horse's flanks, and in a moment the three were dashing down the narrow, curving trail, slapped at by leafy branches, stooping, twisting, turning to protect themselves from the interlacing bows.

Behind them the sound of the pursuit came closer. They could hear shouts and the sounds of running horses, yet for a mile their pursuers never once appeared in sight.

Across a narrow forest stream they dashed, and up the steep farther bank. Through an opening in the woods they galloped, diving headlong once more into the trees. The trail curved and twisted up a tree-covered hillside, crossed its top, and continued down its farther side.

Will had all that he could do to dodge the branches that swung at him, and failed to notice that Morton was dropping farther behind, his horse limping badly. Nor did Osborn look about. He was far too busy with his own horse and with the difficulty of leading Will's to take any notice of Morton's difficulties.

On they rode and on. The forest ended suddenly and they rode into the sunlight, with a quarter mile

of grassy sward ahead of them. Osborn spurred more rapidly, and not until he had all but crossed the open space did he look about, and only then at a shout from Will. But what he beheld only caused him to spur again. In another moment the two were dashing headlong among the trees again, with Osborn riding more furiously than ever, conscious, now, that Morton, far behind, was all but caught by the furiously riding pursuers who had burst into the open hardly a stone's throw behind the trailing man.

Another mile the trail led through the trees, and quite suddenly came out within sight of an inlet from South River. Another hundred yards and Osborn pulled up suddenly.

"Get off," he shouted to Will, pulling out his pistol as he did so. "Now, come with me."

With a pistol pressed against his back Will was hurried through the trees to the edge of a steep bank.

"Down here," ordered Osborn, and together they stumbled down to the water's edge.

A boat lay there, hidden from above by a pile of branches, and as they appeared, seven sailors leaped to their feet from their resting places in the shade.

"Into the boat," ordered Osborn, and as Will stumbled into the stern sheets he heard the officer give his hurried orders. The boat grated on the

gravel, and in a moment was afloat, with its crew scrambling over the sides.

"Out oars," ordered Osborn.

There was a hurried rattle as the oars were thrust into the oar-locks.

"Give way together," ordered Osborn, and in another moment the boat was in the open, gliding smoothly from the shore, to the trained beat of half a dozen oars.

For a hundred yards they rowed before any one spoke again.

"Way enough," ordered Osborn, and the oars stopped, held dripping and parallel above the water.

Will and the naval officer turned about and gazed back toward the spot that they had left.

For a full minute nothing was visible. The woodland shores seemed utterly devoid of life, but as they looked a branch quivered suddenly and they saw a man appear at the water's edge. Another followed and another until half a dozen stood there, gesticulating and talking, their voices faintly drifting out to where the boat lay on the smooth water.

For a moment no one in the boat spoke, and then Will, intent on what had happened ashore, shouted:

"Did you catch Morton?" he cried.

"Silence," growled Osborn.

Faintly a voice came from the group ashore.

"Yes, we caught him," it replied. "Who are you?"

Will glanced at Osborn from the corner of his eye, and decided to shout an answer.

"I'm Will Taylor," he cried. "They have—"

A sudden blow from Osborn's fist struck Will in the face.

"Silence!" growled the officer. "Give way together."

The oars swung and dipped, and the boat, leaving two long, thin, diverging lines of ripples upon the surface of the river, glided farther out into the stream, rounded a point of land, and turned toward where, two miles away, the *Eagle* lay at anchor.

At the Coffee House Tavern Peggy and her father waited impatiently. Members of the Committee of Correspondence were busily engaged on a score of tasks. Patriots were assembling in ever increasing numbers. The street outside the inn was filled with a crowd of excited people—men, women, and children. The public room of the inn was crowded with loudly talking men, who proclaimed and re-proclaimed their opposition to the crown and suggested impossible courses to pursue. Scores of rumors flew about the town. Housewives gathered at front gates talking excitedly, repeating what they had heard. Patriots armed themselves and called upon the Committee of

Correspondence for instructions. A group of young men wheeled out two awkward cannons from the shed in which they were stored, and without powder or ball to make the weapons effective, harnessed horses to them and dragged them rumbling through the streets. A group of sailors, ashore from merchant ships in the harbor, hooted and yelled their defiance of King George as they strode excitedly through the streets.

For two hours Annapolis seethed with aimless excitement. A score of horsemen, having set out to follow the first group that had followed after Will Taylor, missed the trail that led into the forest, and came back dejectedly to attempt an explanation.

But finally, from beyond Church Circle, came the sounds of shouting men. The milling crowd before the inn responded with a rush and from Chancery Lane to Church Circle and beyond, the street was filled with the excited throng, hurrying toward where the growing chorus of glad shouts and catcalls told of something interesting. And finally, meeting a cavalcade in the center of which rode a frowning dejected man on a limping horse, the crowd surrounded the mounted men, and constantly shouting their sentiments—their hatred of the king—their determination to oppose him—they milled about and obstructed the way, and cheered and shouted all the way back to

where the Committee of Correspondence and a score of other less easily excited folk, stood waiting before the Coffee House Tavern.

With some difficulty Mr. Morton was led through the throng and into the public room of the inn. With more difficulty still the inn was cleared of the milling crowd, and finally, in a guarded room on the second floor, Mr. Morton found himself confronted with the very members of the committee that had called on him the evening before, while Peggy and her father, silent and serious, sat watching him from their chairs at one side of the room.

Three of the horsemen who had followed the fleeing Morton stood silently awaiting the pleasure of the committee, and Morton, conscious now that he had utterly and completely failed, sat biting his lip and frowning at the floor, impatiently awaiting what was so certain, now, to come. Now and then his eye rested nervously on a packet of papers that lay on the table about which the committee was gathered—a packet that had been taken from his pocket by his captors when, overtaken on the trail, he had been surrounded and overpowered.

For several minutes the room was filled with a clatter of conversation, and the sound of moving chairs and feet. The papers in the packet were opened and piled before Mr. Carroll, who, having

called the committee together, was now acting as its chairman. He sorted the papers carefully and put them down again, looked about the room, and rapped upon the table.

"The meeting will come to order," he announced. "Captain Bowie, will you, as the leader of the party that captured the prisoner, tell us your version of what occurred?"

Concisely the captain described the chase, told of finding Will's bent sapling pointing along the obscure trail, and of Will's directions, written with a stick in the earth of the road. He told of the chase, of Morton's capture, and of seeing Will in the small boat that was seen making off to a ship, which he guessed to be the *Eagle*, lying at the mouth of South River, not far from Arundel.

"Then Will Taylor has been taken prisoner?" asked Mr. Carroll.

"Yes, sir," replied the captain.

"By whom?"

"We do not know, sir, except that the men in the boat with him were obviously British sailors."

"What have you to say, Mr. Morton?" asked Mr. Carroll.

"Nothing," replied Morton.

"Do you still contend that Mr. Pendleton is guilty of the crimes you attributed to him last evening?"

"Supporting His Majesty is no crime, sir."

"You do not answer my question."

"I have nothing more to say."

"Then, gentlemen," remarked Mr. Carroll, "we must go through these papers thoroughly, and prepare what other information we have, in order to confront Mr. Morton with the charges that are to be brought against him. In order to prepare these data the meeting is adjourned."

There was a shuffle of feet, a pushing back of chairs. Mr. Morton was taken to another room and kept there under guard, while the committee, with Peggy and Mr. Pendleton to assist them, prepared the material that they required.

Of the papers that had been taken from Mr. Pendleton all but one were in code, and that one Mr. Pendleton recognized instantly as the one that had taken him to Philadelphia. Peggy, on the other hand, was interested in nothing save Will's safety and the code messages. With the message she still carried in her "pocket," which contained the code that she and Will had used, and with the assistance of two members of the committee, she set about decoding the papers that lay before them. Three hours passed before the task was done.

The group adjourned for a hurried dinner and reassembled in order to continue the work which, now

that the code messages were translated, grew clearer every minute.

"The case against him is perfect," remarked Mr. Carroll, when the task had been completed. "Having been appointed by the crown to do what he could to influence the colonies in the king's favor, he combined with Perrin to keep Maryland from rebelling in unison with the other colonies. Their scheme was clever, for with Maryland loyal to the king the colonies would be absolutely cut in two. Thus the colonies to the south of us would have been cut off from those to the north, and the armies of the king would have been able to crush each half of the revolution separately.

"Their plan was well thought out," he continued, "and had it succeeded they would have deserved a reward at the hands of the king. But they weren't content with that. Here is a paper that explains the reason for their desire to arrest the leaders of the patriots in Maryland."

He paused again.

"It is strange," he went on, "how greed sometimes influences men. To arrest the men who were leaders of the patriot party in Maryland was not enough for these men. They must attempt so to arrest them that their great estates would fall into the hands of these two—Morton and Perrin. And from the way their

plans seem to have progressed they finally grew so greedy that the seizure of the estates became, to them, a more important factor than service to the crown."

Mr. Pendleton grunted.

"It is part and parcel with what I learned in Philadelphia," he remarked. "Morton had told me a most plausible story in order to influence me favorably. I was already a supporter of the crown, and I believed his story. Then it was that he obtained letters from me to Carroll of Carrollton, Samuel Chase, and William Paca, our representatives in Philadelphia. Foolishly I wrote them that Morton was absolutely to be trusted. I can only excuse myself by explaining that I thought he was.

"But I found, in Philadelphia, that the story he had told them was radically different from what he told me. They are even now under the belief that the king has promised to agree to all Maryland's demands if only our delegates refuse to sign the declaration that is being drawn up. It was because I learned that that I returned to Annapolis when I did."

Mr. Carroll smiled.

"In order to be arrested," he remarked.

"In order to declare myself in opposition to a government that uses such men and such methods," he replied, "and to urge this committee to send definite

instructions to our representatives at the Continental Congress urging them to sign with the others."

"Are they doubtful?" cried Mr. Carroll.

"So they expressed themselves to me," nodded Mr. Pendleton.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Carroll, suddenly, looking about at the other members of the committee, "we cannot issue instructions in the name of the people of Maryland, but we can send word of this to our representatives. With your approval I shall send a messenger at once."

"I so move," cried some one.

"I second the motion," cried another.

"Those in favor?" asked Mr. Carroll.

A chorus of "ayes" followed.

"Opposed?"

There was not a sound.

"It is so ordered," went on Mr. Carroll. "Gentlemen, will you draw up the message? When it is prepared I shall request Captain Bowie to carry it."

Within half an hour the captain was called, received the message and departed.

"And look out for Mr. Perrin on the way," cried Peggy after him as he left the room. "He's on his way back."

"I'll do it, Miss Peggy," replied the captain from the top of the stairs. "Good-by."

They heard his horse's hoof beats as he trotted up the street, and returned to their tasks, only vaguely hearing a series of shouts and angry cries from down the street. But hardly had they settled themselves to their task once more when a man ran breathless into the public room below, dashed headlong up the stairs and burst into the room in which they were sitting.

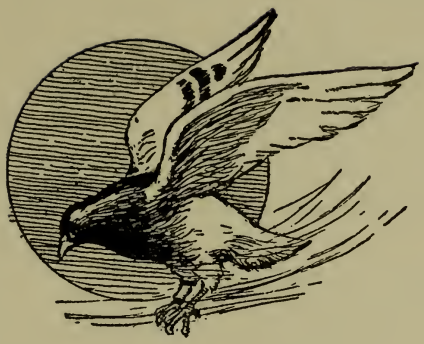
"The *Eagle!*" he cried. "She's coming up the harbor with her guns run out and her boarding nettings triced."

Every one in the room leaped to his feet.

"Does she mean to bombard the city?" asked some one.

"It's possible," replied Mr. Carroll. "Come. Let us see what we can do."

RECOGNITION



CHAPTER XIV

RECOGNITION

Down to the waterfront the committee hurried. Peggy, as keenly interested as the others in what was going on, begged to go along, but her father refused.

"It's no place for girls," he replied. "Run, now. You should be home anyway. Your mother must be worried. Tell her what has happened, and tell her, too, that I shall come as soon as I possibly can."

"You'll tell me what happens, won't you, Mr. Carroll?" cried Peggy.

"My dear young lady," replied Carroll, "the moment I can I shall pay my respects to you at Pendleton Hall and report every detail."

Peggy watched them hurry down the street, and finally, with lagging steps, made her way home, listening intently every step of the way for the sound of cannon or of musketry. Why the *Eagle* should so abruptly have come into the harbor she could not guess, unless it was to land troops so as to capture the patriot leaders, or to do something of the kind, and to Peggy it seemed as if all her efforts might yet come to naught.

But listen though she would, no sound of cannon came to her ears, and finally she slipped through the gate at Pendleton Hall, and hurried to her mother, there to tell, in the utmost detail, the entire story of what had happened.

Mrs. Pendleton, still worried, had nevertheless recovered from the shock of the night before, and she listened intently to her daughter's story, while Mammy Lou, wide-eyed with amazement stood nearby, listening with all her ears to the adventure her young mistress had had.

" 'Clar t' goodness," she repeated from time to time. " 'Clar t' goodness. Honest, Miss Peggy. I 'clar t' goodness."

"And Will is a prisoner on that ship?" cried Mrs. Pendleton. "What can we do?"

Peggy shook her head.

"I'm sure I don't know, Mother," she admitted. "But anyway, Mr. Morton is a prisoner. Maybe—But I don't know. It *is* bad, isn't it?"

An hour passed—two hours, and Peggy, too interested to think of anything else, finally insisted on sending Cornelius off to learn what had happened. But another hour passed, and Cornelius did not return.

It seemed obvious that nothing very terrible could have taken place, but though a realization that the

threatened bombardment had not occurred took away some of the girl's anxiety, her uncertainty made her more and more determined to learn more than she knew.

A dozen times she threatened to go herself, only to be talked out of her idea by her mother. But finally unable to wait longer, she leaped to her feet.

"I'll go on horseback," she cried. "I *must* go."

And though Mrs. Pendleton called after her, Peggy paid no attention, and hurried off to the stable to order her horse saddled.

She was impatient with the stable boy, and urged him repeatedly to make speed. But only after some delay was the horse led out.

"Help me to mount," she ordered, but even as she put her hand on the saddle she heard a familiar voice.

"Peggy," it called. "Oh, Peg."

She turned abruptly, with tears of gladness in her eyes.

"Will," she cried. "Will."

He came running along the path from the house, and she ran toward him.

"Oh, Will," she cried, as he flung his arm about her. "Oh, Will, tell me—tell me—what has happened?"

Will laughed.

"Come to the house," he ordered. "You have callers."

"But, Will," she insisted, "how did you ever get off that ship?"

"All in good time," he replied. "Come to the house. Mr. Carroll can tell you better than I can."

And so, perforce, she hurried with her cousin back to the house, her curiosity still unsatisfied.

"Well, Miss Peggy?" laughed Mr. Carroll from the porch as she came up the steps. "I told you I'd come to make my report."

"What happened, Mr. Carroll?" she cried. "Do tell me. I'm dying to know."

"Then come and sit down," he suggested.

And not until her mother and her father, Mr. Carroll, and Will and herself were all seated would he say a word more.

"Oh, do tell me," she begged again.

"Very well, Miss Peggy," he began. "When we left you we went down to the waterfront and found the *Eagle* coming up the harbor, looking very fierce with her guns run out, her crew at their stations, and the boarding nettings triced up. She came in slowly, and finally let go her anchor about a hundred yards from shore at the foot of Prince George Street. We didn't at all know what to do, until some one on the

ship shouted that Captain Ponsonby demanded to speak with some one in authority.

"I replied that we would respect him if he wished to come ashore and so, under cover of his own guns, he entered his gig and landed right where we were standing.

"A tremendous crowd had gathered, of course, and the captain demanded the instant release of Mr. Morton, whereupon the crowd shouted themselves hoarse, and we could not carry on our conversation at all.

"Your father then suggested that we take the captain to Brice House, which was the closest place that seemed appropriate. He hesitated at first, but we assured him of our good intentions, and he accepted.

"Naturally our conversation took some time, for he was insistent, and we were determined, but gradually we told him in detail the story of Mr. Morton's activities, and proved it to him by the papers that we had. The result of that was that he began to see that Mr. Morton had been going contrary to the instructions that had been given him.

"Having made that clear to him, we soon saw that he and his officers, at least, were thoroughly honest and gentlemanly. They were entirely unacquainted with Morton's plans for enriching himself—"

"And Mr. Perrin," put in Peggy.

"And Mr. Perrin," agreed Mr. Carroll.

"Then I asked if it did not seem to him that Mr. Morton had been playing fast and loose with His Majesty's government as well as with Maryland and the other colonies.

"He frowned a bit at that, but admitted that it was true.

"At that, your father suggested that it might be even more appropriate for Mr. Morton's punishment to come from His Majesty than from us.

"We all agreed, whereupon we told Captain Ponsonby that if he would release our friend Will, we in turn, would turn Mr. Morton over to him.

"After some hesitation, he agreed. And here we are, while the *Eagle,* the last I saw of her, was almost out of the harbor with Mr. Morton on board as a prisoner bound for goodness knows where."

Peggy drew a long breath of relief.

"Then it is all over?" she asked.

"I believe so," nodded Mr. Carroll. "So far as Mr. Morton and the *Eagle* are concerned with Annapolis it seems to be all over."

Peggy sighed again.

"I'm *so* glad," she admitted.

Mr. Carroll smiled.

"But, Miss Peggy," he went on, "I want to ask you a question."

She looked at him in surprise.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Well, I'd like to know how you ever got started on this affair."

Peggy smiled.

"Oh, that was just an accident," she replied.

"But what was the accident?"

"Well, always until this year I have had a birthday party, and this year it looked as if I wasn't going to have one."

She looked down at her hands and flushed a bit at what seemed to be a very silly reason for starting so important an adventure, but having started she continued.

"Then one day I was out in the summerhouse, wondering what I could do to have my party, and I saw a bird alight on the lawn. Something seemed wrong with it, so I went and picked it up, and found that it was a carrier pigeon.

"I knew that Will had some carrier pigeons, but I didn't know that you couldn't send them with messages anywhere you wanted to, so when I found this message"—she pulled the message from her "pocket" once again—"and it seemed to say something about the party I was wondering about, and was signed 'Will,' why, then I knew that he was trying to plan my party for me.

"So I wrote a note and put it in the tube, and let the pigeon go when it was rested. And when I didn't hear from Will I went out to see him. And all this came from that."

Mr. Carroll smiled.

"And you didn't get your party?" he asked.

Peggy looked down and shook her head shyly.

"When is your birthday?"

She hesitated.

"To-day," she replied.

Mr. Carroll smiled.

"Well, my dear," he said, "you and your cousin Will have been very useful to the cause of liberty."

He cleared his throat.

"But I must be going," he continued. "Good-by. I hope to have the pleasure of seeing you all again soon—*very* soon."

He bowed and departed, leaving a very silent group on the porch at Pendleton Hall.

No one spoke, so relieved were they at the outcome of the affair, and for half an hour they seemed far less talkative than usual. Peggy did beg Will to tell of his experiences on the *Eagle,* but he had to admit that very little happened about which he knew, for he had been locked in a cabin all the time he had been aboard.

But even as he told what little he had to tell a

Negro messenger appeared with three freshly addressed notes in his hand, and obsequiously delivered one to Mr. and Mrs. Pendleton, one to Will and one to Peggy herself.

Peggy looked at hers in surprise, turned it over and looked again. Whom it was from she did not know, and so she broke the seal and read what was written within.

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Carroll," she read, "cordially invite Miss Peggy Pendleton to be present at a birthday party in her honor to be given the evening of June twentieth, 1776, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Carroll in Green Street."

For a moment Peggy could not believe her eyes, and she carefully re-read the note. But there could be no doubt about it. The invitation was a reality.

She glanced up and found her mother, her father, and Will all smiling their broadest smiles at her, and in another moment she had leaped to her feet, had kissed them all around, and had dashed through the open door and up the massive stairs in order to choose from her wardrobe the dress that she would wear.

It is probable that of all the festivities with which old Annapolis was familiar, none was gayer or more carefree than that birthday party of Peggy Pendleton's. Gathered in her honor was every citizen of importance in the little city. Throngs of young

patriots vied with each other to honor the girl who had taken so important a part in ridding the city of the greatest danger that confronted it during all the years of the long-drawn Revolutionary War. Every member of the Committee of Correspondence openly gave her and her cousin the credit they deserved. Mr. Charles Carroll the Barrister himself took her out to dinner on his arm, and proposed the toast that was drunk to her with a glad shout of approbation.

The mansion on Green Street rang with merriment and pleasure, and not a guest failed to congratulate the heroine and the hero of the hour. Far into the night the guests remained, and when, at last, they had departed, Mr. Carroll looked questioningly at Peggy again.

"Peggy, my dear," he began, "all of this business is quite clear to me now, with the exception of one thing."

"What is that, Mr. Carroll?" she asked.

"That first message," he explained.

Peggy shook her head.

"I don't know either," she replied.

Mr. Pendleton cleared his throat.

"That has been bothering me, too," he admitted, "but I have been putting two and two together, and I believe I have the explanation."

"What?" cried Peggy.

"What does that first message you received say?" asked her father.

She took it from the "pocket" in which she still carried it.

"Here it is," she began. "It reads, 'Have completed plans for party. Certain of success. Secret. Will' "

"And what did you write in reply?"

"I wrote, 'Do not see how party can succeed. Can't you let me have more details?"

Mr. Pendleton nodded and smiled.

"I have it," he remarked. "Here is what happened. That pigeon was one sent by Morton in Philadelphia to Perrin with a note for me. The note was written on two pieces of paper, and you took only one from the tube. Look. Here are the two pieces that came to me. I kept them when we took them from Morton this morning.

"See? The first of these two slips contains the message you wrote. The second one reads 'be at Philadelphia three days. Will see you then. Morton.' "

He held them up.

"Now look," he continued. "If we read the message Peggy received with the second part of the one Perrin brought to me it makes sense. Here is what it would say: 'Have completed plans for party. Certain

of success. Secret. Will be at Philadelphia three days. Will see you then. Morton.' "

Mr. Carroll nodded.

"You have it, Mr. Pendleton," he agreed. "You have it. And when Perrin received a message written half by Peggy and half by Morton it mixed him up. And it mixed you, too. Morton didn't want you in Philadelphia, but when Peggy changed the message it made you think you'd better go."

"But there is one thing more," put in Peggy. "Why was part of the code on the message I got?"

Mr. Carroll laughed.

"That is easy to answer," he explained. "Perrin didn't have the code and Morton was sending it to him. He wrote part of it on the back of the first half of the message, and part on the back of the second. See? Here is where Perrin scratched out the part he received before he gave your father this message."

"Don't you think you have everything explained now, dear?" asked Peggy's mother. "It is very late."

"One thing more," put in Will. "Why should only one piece of paper from Mr. Morton's packet fall down Peggy's chimney from where it was hidden in the hole in the flue?"

"Oh, Will," cried Peggy, "that's no question at all. Peter—he's my kitten. Mr. Carroll—goes back and

forth through that hole all the time. He probably rubbed up against the papers and pushed one loose, and it fell on my side when Mr. Morton reached for the packet. Isn't that clear enough?"

Will laughed.

"It suits me," he admitted.

"I think the outcome suits us all, Will," nodded Mr. Carroll. "Don't you think so, Peggy?"

Peggy smiled.

"It suits me, Mr. Carroll," she replied.

More than a century and a half have passed since Peggy Pendleton picked up the tired pigeon on the lawn of Pendleton Hall. Pendleton Hall itself has long since disappeared, as has the home of Charles Carroll the Barrister. But changed though Annapolis is since those days of long ago, it is probable that no other city in the whole United States retains so much of the atmosphere of those great times. It is true that Church Street is called Main Street now. It is true that where stood the home of Mr. Carroll the Barrister now stands the big brick public school where the children of the town congregate daily to study and recite. But changed though "the Paris of America" is, there are scores of old landmarks that were there in Peggy's day. The home of the three signers of the Declaration of Independence still stand—the home of

Charles Carroll of Carrollton, of Samuel Chase and William Paca. Still many of the old street names remain, and one feels something of other days as he walks along Prince George Street and Duke of Gloucester Street and Church Circle. Somehow more than a little of the spirit of those who lived there long ago still clings to the old mansions and to the narrow streets. Somehow something that Peggy Pendleton and those others of her day have left behind them still seems to mark the very soul of old Annapolis.

THE END